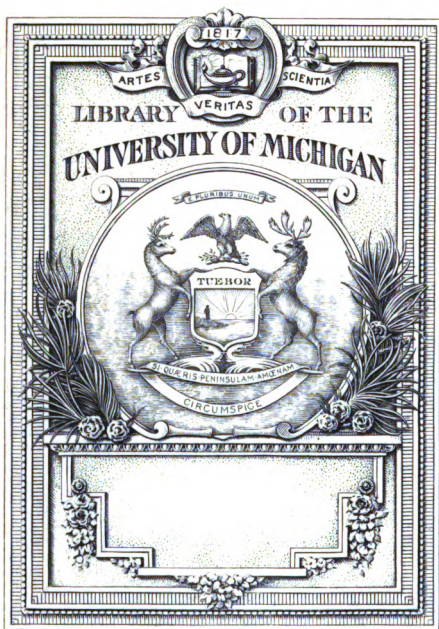


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MEN AND WOMEN
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BY

ROBERT BROWNING.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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MEN AND WOMEN.

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS.

1.

WHERE the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop—

2.

Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)

Of our country's very capital, its prince
Ages since
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
Peace or war.

3.

Now—the country does not even boast a tree,
As you see,
To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills
From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
Into one)

4.

Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
Up like fires
O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor be prest,
Twelve abreast.

5.

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
Never was !
Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'erspreads
And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
Stock or stone—

6.

Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe.
Long ago ;
Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
Struck them tame ;
And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
Bought and sold.

7.

Now,—the single little turret that remains
On the plains,

By the caper overrooted, by the gourd

Overscored,

While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks

Through the chinks—

8.

Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time

Sprang sublime,

And a burning ring all round, the chariots traced

As they raced,

And the monarch and his minions and his dames

Viewed the games.

9.

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve

Smiles to leave

To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece

In such peace,

And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey

Melt away—

10.

That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair

Waits me there

In the turret, whence the charioteers caught soul

For the goal, [dumb

When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless,

Till I come.

11.

But he looked upon the city, every side,

Far and wide,

All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'

Colonnades,

All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then,

All the men!

12.

When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,

Either hand

On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
Of my face,
Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
Each on each.

13.

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
South and north,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
As the sky,
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force—
Gold, of course.

14.

Oh, heart! oh, blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest.
Love is best!

A LOVERS' QUARREL.



1.

Oh, what a dawn of day !
How the March sun feels like May !
All is blue again
After last night's rain,
And the South dries the hawthorn-spray.
Only, my Love's away !
I'd as lief that the blue were grey.

2.

Runnels, which rillels swell,
Must be dancing down the dell

With a foamy head
On the beryl bed
Paven smooth as a hermit's cell ;
Each with a tale to tell,
Could my Love but attend as well.

3.

Dearest, three months ago !
When we lived blocked-up with snow,—
When the wind would edge
In and in his wedge,
In, as far as the point could go—
Not to our ingle, though,
Where we loved each the other so !

4.

Laughs with so little cause !
We devised games out of straws.
We would try and trace
One another's face

In the ash, as an artist draws ;
Free on each other's flaws,
How we chattered like two church daws !

5.

What's in the "Times?"—a scold
At the emperor deep and cold ;
He has taken a bride
To his gruesome side,
That's as fair as himself is bold :
There they sit ermine-stoled,
And she powders her hair with gold.

6.

Fancy the Pampas' sheen !
Miles and miles of gold and green
Where the sun-flowers blow
In a solid glow,

And to break now and then the screen—
Black neck and eyeballs keen,
Up a wild horse leaps between !

7.

Try, will our table turn ?
Lay your hands there light, and yearn
Till the yearning slips
Thro' the finger tips
In a fire which a few discern,
And a very few feel burn,
And the rest, they may live and learn !

8.

Then we would up and pace,
For a change, about the place,
Each with arm o'er neck.
'Tis our quarter-deck,

We are seamen in woeful case.

Help in the ocean-space !

Or, if no help, we'll embrace.

9.

See, how she looks now, drest

In a sledging-cap and vest.

'Tis a huge fur cloak—

Like a reindeer's yoke

Falls the lappet along the breast :

Sleeves for her arms to rest,

Or to hang, as my Love likes best.

10.

Teach me to flirt a fan

As the Spanish ladies can,

Or I tint your lip

With a burnt stick's tip

And you turn into such a man !

Just the two spots that span
Half the bill of the young male swan.

11.

Dearest, three months ago

When the mesmeriser Snow

With his hand's first sweep

Put the earth to sleep,

'Twas a time when the heart could show

All—how was earth to know,

'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro !

12.

Dearest, three months ago

When we loved each other so,

Lived and loved the same

Till an evening came

When a shaft from the Devil's bow
Pierced to our ingle-glow,
And the friends were friend and foe !

13.

Not from the heart beneath—
'Twas a bubble born of breath,
Neither sneer nor vaunt,
Nor reproach nor taunt.
See a word, how it severeth !
Oh, power of life and death
In the tongue, as the Preacher saith !

14.

Woman, and will you cast
For a word, quite off at last,
Me, your own, your you,—
Since, as Truth is true,

I was you all the happy past—
Me do you leave aghast
With the memories we amassed ?

15.

Love, if you knew the light
That your soul casts in my sight,
How I look to you
For the pure and true,
And the beauteous and the right,—
Bear with a moment's spite
When a mere mote threatens the white !

16.

What of a hasty word ?
Is the fleshly heart not stirred
By a worm's pin-prick
Where its roots are quick ?

See the eye, by a fly's-foot blurred—

Ear, when a straw is heard

Scratch the brain's coat of curd!

17.

Foul be the world or fair,

More or less, how can I care?

'Tis the world the same

For my praise or blame,

And endurance is easy there.

Wrong in the one thing rare—

Oh, it is hard to bear!

18.

Here's the spring back or close,

When the almond-blossom blows;

We shall have the word

In that minor third

There is none but the cuckoo knows—
Heaps of the guelder-rose!
I must bear with it, I suppose.

19.

Could but November come,
Were the noisy birds struck dumb
At the warning slash
Of his driver's-lash—
I would laugh like the valiant Thumb
Facing the castle glum
And the giant's fee-faw-fum!

So

20.

Then, were the world well stript
Of the gear wherein equipped
We can stand apart,
Heart dispense with heart

In the sun, with the flowers unnipped,—
Oh, the world's hangings ripped,
We were both in a bare-walled crypt!

21.

Each in the crypt would cry
"But one freezes here! and why?
When a heart as chill
At my own would thrill
Back to life, and its fires out-fly?
Heart, shall we live or die?
The rest, . . . settle it by and by!"

22.

So, she'd efface the score,
And forgive me as before.
Just at twelve o'clock
I shall hear her knock

In the worst of a storm's uproar—

I shall pull her through the door—

I shall have her for evermore!

EVELYN HOPE.

1.

BEAUTIFUL Evelyn Hope is dead
Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her book-shelf, this her bed ;
She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die too, in the glass.
Little has yet been changed, I think—
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

2.

Sixteen years old when she died !

Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name—

It was not her time to love : beside,

Her life had many a hope and aim,

Duties enough and little cares,

And now was quiet, now astir—

Till God's hand beckoned unawares,

And the sweet white brow is all of her.

3.

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope ?

What, your soul was pure and true,

The good stars met in your horoscope,

Made you of spirit, fire and dew—

And just because I was thrice as old,

And our paths in the world diverged so wide,

Each was nought to each, must I be told ?

We were fellow mortals, nought beside ?

4.

No, indeed! for God above

Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love,—

I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,

Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few—
Much is to learn and much to forget

Ere the time be come for taking you.

5.

But the time will come,—at last it will,

When, Evelyn Hope, what meant, I shall say,
In the lower earth, in the years long still,

That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
And your mouth of your own geranium's red—
And what you would do with me, in fine,
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

6.

I have lived, I shall say, so much since then,
Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes ;
Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
Either I missed or itself missed me—
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope !
What is the issue ? let us see !

7.

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while ;
My heart seemed full as it could hold—
There was place and to spare for the frank young smile
And the red young mouth and the hair's young gold.
So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep—
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand.
There, that is our secret ! go to sleep ;
You will wake, and remember, and understand.

UP AT A VILLA—DOWN IN THE CITY.

(AS DISTINGUISHED BY AN ITALIAN PERSON OF QUALITY.)



1.

HAD I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,

The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-square.

Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

2.

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear, at least!

There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect
feast ;

While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more
than a beast.

3.

Well now, look at our villa ! stuck like the horn of
a bull

Just on a mountain's edge as bare as the creature's
skull,

Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull !
—I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair's
turned wool.

4.

But the city, oh the city—the square with the houses !
Why?

They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there's some-
thing to take the eye !

Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry !

You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters, who
hurries by :

Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when the
sun gets high ;

And the shops with fanciful signs which are
painted properly.

5.

What of a villa ? Though winter be over in March
by rights,

'Tis May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered
well off the heights :

You've the brown ploughed land before, where the
oxen steam and wheeze,

And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint grey
olive trees.

6.

Is it better in May, I ask you ? you've summer all
at once ;

In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April
suns !

'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen
three fingers well,

The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its
great red bell,

Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children
to pick and sell.

7.

Is it ever hot in the square ? There's a fountain to
spout and splash !

In the shade it sings and springs ; in the shine such
foam-bows flash

On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and
paddle and pash

Round the lady atop in the conch—fifty gazers do
not abash,

Though all that she wears is some weeds round her
waist in a sort of sash !

8.

All the year long at the villa, nothing's to see though
you linger,

Except yon cypress that points like Death's lean lifted
forefinger.

Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix in the corn
and mingle,

Or thrid the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem
a-tingle.

Late August or early September, the stunning cicada
is shrill,

And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the
resinous firs on the hill.

Enough of the seasons,—I spare you the months of
the fever and chill.

9.

Ere opening your eyes in the city, the blessed church-
bells begin :

No sooner the bells leave off, than the diligence rattles
in :

You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never
a pin.

By and by there's the travelling doctor gives pills,
lets blood, draws teeth ;

Or the Pulcinello-trumpet breaks up the market
beneath.

At the post-office such a scene-picture—the new
play, piping hot !

And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal
thieves were shot.

Above it, behold the archbishop's most fatherly of
rebukes,

And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little
new law of the Duke's !

Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend
Don So-and-so

Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Saint Jerome,
and Cicero,

“And moreover,” (the sonnet goes rhyming,) “the
 skirts of St. Paul has reached,
 Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more
 unctuous than ever he preached.”
 Noon strikes,—here sweeps the procession! our Lady
 borne smiling and smart
 With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven
 swords stuck in her heart!
Bang, whang, whang, goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle*
 the fife;
 No keeping one’s haunches still: it’s the greatest
 pleasure in life.

10.

But bless you, it’s dear—it’s dear! fowls, wine, at
 double the rate.
 They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil
 pays passing the gate
 It’s a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me,
 not the city!

Beggars can scarcely be choosers—but still—ah, the
pity, the pity!

Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks
with cowls and sandals,

And the penitents dressed in white shirts, a-holding
the yellow candles.

One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a cross
with handles,

And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the
better prevention of scandals.

Bang, whang, whang, goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle*
the fife.

Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure
in life!

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD.



1.

LET's contend no more, Love,
Strive nor weep—
All be as before, Love,
—Only sleep!

2.

What so wild as words are?
—I and thou
In debate, as birds are,
Hawk on bough!

3.

See the creature stalking
 While we speak—
 Hush and hide the talking,
 Cheek on cheek !

4.

What so false as truth is,
 False to thee ?
 Where the serpent's tooth is,
 Shun the tree—

5.

Where the apple reddens
 Never pry—
 Lest we lose our Edens,
 Eve and I !

6.

Be a god and hold me

With a charm—

Be a man and fold me

With thine arm!

7.

Teach me, only teach, Love!

As I ought

I will speak thy speech, Love,

Think thy thought—

8.

Meet, if thou require it,

Both demands,

Laying flesh and spirit

In thy hands!

9.

That shall be to-morrow

Not to-night :

I must bury sorrow

Out of sight.

10.

—Must a little weep, Love,

—Foolish me !

And so fall asleep, Love,

Loved by thee.

FRA LIPPO LIPPI.

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave !
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what's to blame ? you think you see a monk !
What, it's past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar.
The Carmine's my cloister : hunt it up,
Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
Weke, weke, that's crept to keep him company !
Aha, you know your betters ? Then, you'll take

Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off—he's a certain . . . how d'ye call?
Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
In the house that caps the corner. Boh! you were best!
Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
How you affected such a gullet's-gripe!
But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you.
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
And count fair prize what comes into their net?
He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
Just such a face! why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbours me
(And many more beside, lads! more beside!)
And all's come square again. I'd like his face—
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door

With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds
John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
With one hand ("look you, now," as who should say)
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!
It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!
Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
You know them and they take you? like enough!
I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
'Tell you I liked your looks at very first.
Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
To roam the town and sing out carnival,
And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
And saints again. I could not paint all night—
Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of song,—

Flower o' the broom,

Take away love, and our earth is a tomb !

Flower o' the quince,

I let Lisa go, and what good's in life since ?

Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.

Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter,

Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three
slim shapes—

And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,

That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,

Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,

All the bed furniture—a dozen knots,

There was a ladder! down I let myself,

Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,

And after them. I came up with the fun

Hard by St. Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—

Flower o' the rose,

If I've been merry, what matter who knows ?

And so as I was stealing back again

To get to bed and have a bit of sleep

Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—
Mine's shaved,—a monk, you say—the sting's in that!
If Master Cosimo announced himself,
Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!
I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words, there,

While I stood munching my first bread that month :
“ So, boy, you’re minded,” quoth the good fat father
Wiping his own mouth, ’twas refection-time,—
“ To quit this very miserable world ?
Will you renounce ” . . . The mouthful of bread ?
 thought I ;
By no means ! . . . Brief, they made a monk of me ;
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medic
Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.
Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
’Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside !
“ Let’s see what the urchin’s fit for ”—that came next.
Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
Such a to-do ! they tried me with their books.
Lord, they’d have taught me Latin in pure waste !
Flower o’ the clove,

All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love!

But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
Eight years together, as my fortune was,
Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
And who will curse or kick him for his pains—
Which gentleman processional and fine,
Holding a candle to the Sacrament
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
The droppings of the wax to sell again,
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
His bone from the heap of offal in the street!
—The soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
He learns the look of things, and none the less
For admonitions from the hunger-pinch.
I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
Which, after I found leisure, turned to use:
I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
Scrawled them within the antiphony's marge,

Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
Found nose and eyes and chin for A.s and B.s,
And made a string of pictures of the world
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked
black.

"Nay," quoth the Prior, "turn him out, d'ye say?
In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
What if at last we get our man of parts,
We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
And put the front on it that ought to be!"
And hereupon they bade me daub away.
Thank you! my head being crammed, their walls a
blank,

Never was such prompt disemburdening.
First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
I drew them, fat and lean: then, folks at church,
From good old gossips waiting to confess
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—

To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
With the little children round him in a row
Of admiration, half for his beard and half
For that white anger of his victim's son
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
Signing himself with the other because of Christ
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years)
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head
Which the intense eyes looked through, came at eve
On tip-toe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
Her pair of ear-rings and a bunch of flowers
The brute took growling, prayed, and then was gone.
I painted all, then cried "'tis ask and have—
Choose, for more's ready!"—laid the ladder flat,
And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
Till checked, (taught what to see and not to see,
Being simple bodies) "that's the very man!

Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog !
That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes
To care about his asthma : it's the life ! ”
But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funk'd—
Their betters took their turn to see and say :
The Prior and the learned pulled a face
And stopped all that in no time. “ How ? what's here ?
Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all !
Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
As much as pea and pea ! it's devil's-game !
Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
Your business is to paint the souls of men—
Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . no it's not . .
It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
It's . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul !
Give us no more of body than shows soul.

Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God!
That sets you praising,—why not stop with him?
Why put all thoughts of praise out of our heads
With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
Rub all out, try at it a second time.
Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,—
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off—
Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
When what you put for yellow's simply black,
And any sort of meaning looks intense
When all beside itself means and looks nought.
Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,

The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty
You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
Sorrow or joy ? won't beauty go with these ?
Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them threefold ?
Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—
(I never saw it—put the case the same—)
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents,—
That's somewhat. And you'll find the soul you have
missed,
Within yourself when you return Him thanks !
“Rub all out !” well, well, there's my life, in short,
And so the thing has gone on ever since.
I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds—
You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear to never kiss the girls—
I'm my own master, paint now as I please—
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house !

Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front—
Those great rings serve more purposes than just
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!
And yet the old schooling sticks—the old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still—"It's Art's decline, my son!
You're not of the true painters, great and old:
Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find:
Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer.
Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!"
Flower o' the pine,
You keep your mistr . . . manners, and I'll stick to mine!
I'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know!
Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
They, with their Latin? so I swallow my rage,
Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
To please them—sometimes do, and sometimes don't,
For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
A turn—some warm eve finds me at my saints—
A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—

(Flower o' the peach,

Death for us all, and his own life for each !)

And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs o'er,

The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,

And I do these wild things in sheer despite,

And play the fooleries you catch me at,

In pure rage ! the old mill-horse, out at grass

After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,

Although the miller does not preach to him

The only good of grass is to make chaff.

What would men have ? Do they like grass or no—

May they or mayn't they ? all I want's the thing

Settled for ever one way : as it is,

You tell too many lies and hurt yourself.

You don't like what you only like too much,

You do like what, if given you at your word,

You find abundantly detestable.

For me, I think I speak as I was taught—

I always see the Garden and God there

A-making man's wife—and, my lesson learned,

The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterward.

You understand me: I'm a beast, I know.

But see, now—why, I see as certainly
As that the morning-star's about to shine,
What will hap some day. We've a youngster here
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop—
His name is Guidi—he'll not mind the monks—
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—
He picks my practice up—he'll paint apace,
I hope so—though I never live so long,
I know what's sure to follow. You be judge!
You speak no Latin more than I, belike—
However, you're my man, you've seen the world
—The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!
—For what? do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,

The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to ? What's it all about ?
To be passed o'er, despised ? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at ? oh, this last of course, you say.
But why not do as well as say,—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it ?
God's works—paint anyone, and count it crime
To let a truth slip. Don't object, " His works
Are here already—nature is complete :
Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
There's no advantage ! you must beat her, then."
For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see ;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that—
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
Your cullion's hanging face ? A bit of chalk,

And trust me but you should, though! How much
more,

If I drew higher things with the same truth!
That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
Interpret God to all of you! oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank—it means intensely, and means good:

To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

“Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer”

Strikes in the Prior! “when your meaning's plain

It does not say to folks—remember matins—

Or, mind you fast next Friday.” Why, for this

What need of art at all? A skull and bones,

Two bits of stick nailed cross-wise, or, what's best,

A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.

I painted a St. Laurence six months since

At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style.

“How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down?”

I ask a brother: “Hugely,” he returns—

“Already not one phiz of your three slaves
That turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
But’s scratched and prodded to our heart’s content,
The pious people have so eased their own
When coming to say prayers there in a rage.
We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
Expect another job this time next year,
For pity and religion grow i’ the crowd—
Your painting serves its purpose !” Hang the fools !

—That is—you’ll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine !
Oh, the church knows ! don’t misreport me, now !
It’s natural a poor monk out of bounds
Should have his apt word to excuse himself :
And hearken how I plot to make amends.
I have bethought me : I shall paint a piece
... There’s for you ! Give me six months, then go, see

Something in Sant' Ambrogio's . . . (bless the nuns!
They want a cast of my office) I shall paint
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris-root
When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.
And then in the front, of course a saint or two—
Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz, (and Us without the z,
Painters who need his patience.) Well, all these
Secured at their devotions, up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,
As one by a dark stair into a great light
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—
Mazed, motionless and moon-struck—I'm the man!
Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear?

I, caught up with my monk's things by mistake,
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
I, in this presence, this pure company !

Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape ?
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm—" Not so fast ! "
—Addresses the celestial presence, " nay—
He made you and devised you, after all,
Though he's none of you ! Could Saint John there,
draw—

His camel-hair make up a painting-brush ?
We come to brother Lippo for all that,
Iste perfecit opus ! " So, all smile—
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hothead husband ! Thus I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go

The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
And so all's saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
Your hand, sir, and good bye: no lights, no lights!
The street's hushed, and I know my own way back—
Don't fear me! There's the grey beginning. Zooks!

A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S.



1.

Oh, Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find !

I can hardly misconceive you ; it would prove me
deaf and blind ;

But although I give you credit, 'tis with such a heavy
mind !

2.

Here you come with your old music, and here's all the
good it brings.

What, they lived once thus at Venice, where the mer-
chants were the kings,
Where St. Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed
the sea with rings ?

3.

Ay, because the sea's the street there ; and 'tis arched
by . . . what you call
. . . Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept
the carnival !
I was never out of England—it's as if I saw it all !

4.

Did young people take their pleasure when the sea
was warm in May ?
Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to
mid-day,
When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow,
do you say ?

5.

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so
red,—

On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower
on its bed,

O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might
base his head?

6.

Well (and it was graceful of them) they'd break talk
off and afford

—She, to bite her mask's black velvet, he to finger on
his sword,

While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the
clavichord?

7.

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths
diminished, sigh on sigh,

Told them something? Those suspensions, those
solutions—"Must we die?"
Those commiserating sevenths—"Life might last!
we can but try!"

8.

"Were you happy?"—"Yes."—"And are you still
as happy?"—"Yes—And you?"
—"Then more kisses"—"Did *I* stop them, when a
million seemed so few?"
Hark—the dominant's persistence, till it must be
answered to!

9.

So an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised you,
I dare say!
"Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave
and gay!
I can always leave off talking, when I hear a master
play."

10.

Then they left you for their pleasure : till in due time,
 one by one,
Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds
 as well undone,
Death came tacitly and took them where they never
 see the sun.

11.

But when I sit down to reason,—think to take my
stand nor swerve
Till I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's
close reserve,
In you come with your cold music, till I creep thro'
every nerve.

12.

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a
house was burned—

“Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent
what Venice earned !
The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be
discerned.

13.

“Yours for instance, you know physics, something of
geology,
Mathematics are your pastime ; souls shall rise in
their degree ;
Butterflies may dread extinction,—you'll not die, it
cannot be !

14.

“As for Venice and its people, merely born to bloom
and drop,
Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly
were the crop.
What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had
to stop ?

15.

“Dust and ashes!” So you creak it, and I want the
heart to scold.

Dear dead women, with such hair, too—what’s become
of all the gold

Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly
and grown old.

BY THE FIRE-SIDE.



1.

How well I know what I mean to do

When the long dark Autumn evenings come,
And where, my soul, is thy pleasant hue?

With the music of all thy voices, dumb
In life's November too!

2.

I shall be found by the fire, suppose,

O'er a great wise book as beseemeth age,
While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows,
And I turn the page, and I turn the page,
Not verse now, only prose!

3.

Till the young ones whisper, finger on lip,
 " There he is at it, deep in Greek—
Now or never, then, out we slip
 To cut from the hazels by the creek
A mainmast for our ship."

4.

I shall be at it indeed, my friends!
 Greek puts already on either side
Such a branch-work forth, as soon extends
 To a vista opening far and wide,
And I pass out where it ends.

5.

The outside-frame like your hazel-trees—
 But the inside-archway narrows fast,
And a rarer sort succeeds to these,
 And we slope to Italy at last
And youth, by green degrees.

6.

I follow wherever I am led,
Knowing so well the leader's hand—
Oh, woman-country, wooed, not wed,
Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,
Laid to their hearts instead !

7.

Look at the ruined chapel again
Half way up in the Alpine gorge.
Is that a tower, I point you plain,
Or is it a mill or an iron forge
Breaks solitude in vain ?

8.

A turn, and we stand in the heart of things ;
The woods are round us, heaped and dim ;
From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
The thread of water single and slim,
Thro' the ravage some torrent brings !

9.

Does it feed the little lake below ?

That speck of white just on its marge

Is Pella ; see, in the evening glow

How sharp the silver spear-heads charge

When Alp meets Heaven in snow.

10.

On our other side is the straight-up rock ;

And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it

By boulder-stones where lichens mock

The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit

Their teeth to the polished block.

11.

Oh, the sense of the yellow mountain flowers,

And the thorny balls, each three in one,

The chestnuts throw on our path in showers,

For the drop of the woodland fruit's begun

These early November hours—

12.

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
O'er a shield, else gold from rim to boss,
And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
Elf-needed mat of moss,

13.

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
Last evening—nay, in to-day's first dew
Yon sudden coral nipple bulged
Where a freaked, fawn-coloured, flaky crew
Of toad-stools peep indulged.

14.

And yonder, at foot of the fronting ridge
That takes the turn to a range beyond,
Is the chapel reached by the one-arched bridge
Where the water is stopped in a stagnant pond
Danced over by the midge.

15.

The chapel and bridge are of stone alike,
Blackish grey and mostly wet ;
Cut hemp-stalks steep in the narrow dyke.
See here again, how the lichens fret
And the roots of the ivy strike !

16.

Poor little place, where its one priest comes
On a festa-day, if he comes at all,
To the dozen folk from their scattered homes,
Gathered within that precinct small
By the dozen ways one roams

17.

To drop from the charcoal-burners' huts,
Or climb from the hemp-dressers' low shed,
Leave the grange where the woodman stores his nuts,
Or the wattled cote where the fowlers spread
Their gear on the rock's bare juts.

18.

It has some pretension too, this front,
With its bit of fresco half-moon-wise
Set over the porch, art's early wont—
'Tis John in the Desert, I surmise,
But has borne the weather's brunt—

19.

Not from the fault of the builder, though,
For a pent-house properly projects
Where three carved beams make a certain show,
Dating—good thought of our architect's—
'Five, six, nine, he lets you know.

20.

And all day long a bird sings there,
And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times :
The place is silent and aware ;
It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
But that is its own affair.

21.

My perfect wife, my Leonor,

Oh, heart my own, oh, eyes, mine too,

Whom else could I dare look backward for,

With whom beside should I dare pursue

The path grey heads abhor ?

22.

For it leads to a crag's sheer edge with them ;

Youth, flowery all the way, there stops—

Not they ; age threatens and they contemn,

Till they reach the gulf wherein youth drops,

One inch from our life's safe hem !

23.

With me, youth led—I will speak now,

No longer watch you as you sit

Reading by fire-light, that great brow

And the spirit-small hand propping it

Mutely—my heart knows how—

24.

When, if I think but deep enough,
You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme ;
And you, too, find without a rebuff
The response your soul seeks many a time
Piercing its fine flesh-stuff—

25.

My own, confirm me ! If I tread
This path back, is it not in pride
To think how little I dreamed it led
To an age so blest that by its side
Youth seems the waste instead !

26.

My own, see where the years conduct !
At first, 'twas something our two souls
Should mix as mists do : each is sucked
Into each now ; on, the new stream rolls,
Whatever rocks obstruct.

27.

Think, when our one soul understands
The great Word which makes all things new—
When earth breaks up and Heaven expands—
How will the change strike me and you.
In the House not made with hands ?

28.

Oh, I must feel your brain prompt mine,
Your heart anticipate my heart,
You must be just before, in fine,
See and make me see, for your part,
New depths of the Divine !

29.

But who could have expected this,
When we two drew together first
Just for the obvious human bliss,
To satisfy life's daily thirst
With a thing men seldom miss ?

30.

Come back with me to the first of all,
Let us lean and love it over again—
Let us now forget and then recall,
Break the rosary in a pearly rain,
And gather what we let fall!

31.

What did I say?—that a small bird sings
All day long, save when a brown pair
Of hawks from the wood float with wide wings
Strained to a bell: 'gainst the noon-day glare
You count the streaks and rings.

32.

But at afternoon or almost eve
'Tis better; then the silence grows
To that degree, you half believe
It must get rid of what it knows,
Its bosom does so heave.

33.

Hither we walked, then, side by side,
Arm in arm and cheek to cheek,
And still I questioned or replied,
While my heart, convulsed to really speak,
Lay choking in its pride.

34.

Silent the crumbling bridge we cross,
And pity and praise the chapel sweet,
And care about the fresco's loss,
And wish for our souls a like retreat,
And wonder at the moss.

35.

Stoop and kneel on the settle under—
Look through the window's grated square :
Nothing to see ! for fear of plunder,
The cross is down and the altar bare,
As if thieves don't fear thunder.

36.

We stoop and look in through the grate,
See the little porch and rustic door,
Read duly the dead builder's date,
Then cross the bridge we crossed before,
Take the path again—but wait!

37.

Oh moment, one and infinite!
The water slips o'er stock and stone;
The west is tender, hardly bright.
How grey at once is the evening grown—
One star, the chrysolite!

38.

We two stood there with never a third,
But each by each, as each knew well.
The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
The lights and the shades made up a spell
Till the trouble grew and stirred.

39.

Oh, the little more, and how much it is !

And the little less, and what worlds away !
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this !

40.

Had she willed it, still had stood the screen
So slight, so sure, 'twixt my love and her.
I could fix her face with a guard between,
And find her soul as when friends confer,
Friends—lovers that might have been.

41.

For my heart had a touch of the woodland time,
Wanting to sleep now over its best.
Shake the whole tree in the summer-prime,
But bring to the last leaf no such test.
“Hold the last fast !” says the rhyme.

42.

For a chance to make your little much,
To gain a lover and lose a friend,
Venture the tree and a myriad such,
When nothing you mar but the year can mend !
But a last leaf—fear to touch.

43.

Yet should it unfasten itself and fall
Eddying down till it find your face
At some slight wind—(best chance of all !)
Be your heart henceforth its dwelling-place
You trembled to forestal !

44.

Worth how well, those dark grey eyes,
—That hair so dark and dear, how worth
That a man should strive and agonise,
And taste a very hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize !

45.

Oh, you might have turned and tried a man,
Set him a space to weary and wear,
And prove which suited more your plan,
His best of hope or his worst despair,
Yet end as he began.

46.

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
And filled my empty heart at a word.
If you join two lives, there is oft a scar,
They are one and one, with a shadowy third ;
One near one is too far.

47.

A moment after, and hands unseen
Were hanging the night around us fast.
But we knew that a bar was broken between
Life and life ; we were mixed at last
In spite of the mortal screen.

48.

The forests had done it ; there they stood—

We caught for a second the powers at play :
They had mingled us so, for once and for good,

Their work was done—we might go or stay,
They relapsed to their ancient mood.

49.

How the world is made for each of us !

How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's product thus,

When a soul declares itself—to wit,
By its fruit—the thing it does !

50.

Be Hate that fruit or Love that fruit,

It forwards the General Deed of Man,
And each of the Many helps to recruit

The life of the race by a general plan,
Each living his own, to boot.

51.

I am named and known by that hour's feat,
There took my station and degree.
So grew my own small life complete
As nature obtained her best of me—
One born to love you, sweet !

52.

And to watch you sink by the fire-side now
Back again, as you mutely sit
Musing by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it
Yonder, my heart knows how !

53.

So the earth has gained by one man more,
And the gain of earth must be Heaven's gain too,
And the whole is well worth thinking o'er
When the autumn comes : which I mean to do
One day, as I said before.

ANY WIFE TO ANY HUSBAND.



1.

My love, this is the bitterest, that thou
Who art all truth and who dost love me now
As thine eyes say, as thy voice breaks to say—
Should'st love so truly and could'st love me still
A whole long life through, had but love its will,
Would death that leads me from thee brook delay !

2.

I have but to be by thee, and thy hand
Would never let mine go, thy heart withstand

The beating of my heart to reach its place.
When should I look for thee and feel thee gone ?
When cry for the old comfort and find none ?
Never, I know ! Thy soul is in thy face.

3.

Oh, I should fade—'tis willed so ! might I save,
Gladly I would, whatever beauty gave
Joy to thy sense, for that was precious too.
It is not to be granted. But the soul
Whence the love comes, all ravage leaves that whole ;
Vainly the flesh fades—soul makes all things new.

4.

And 'twould not be because my eye grew dim
Thou could'st not find the love there, thanks to Him
Who never is dishonoured in the spark
He gave us from his fire of fires, and bade
Remember whence it sprang nor be afraid
While that burns on, though all the rest grow dark.

5.

So, how thou would'st be perfect, white and clean
 Outside as inside, soul and soul's demesne
 Alike, this body given to show it by!
 Oh, three-parts through the worst of life's abyss,
 What plaudits from the next world after this,
 Could'st thou repeat a stroke and gain the sky!

6.

And is it not the bitterer to think
 That, disengage our hands and thou wilt sink
 Although thy love was love in very deed?
 I know that nature! Pass a festive day
 Thou dost not throw its relic-flower away
 Nor bid its music's loitering echo speed.

7.

Thou let'st the stranger's glove lie where it fell;
 If old things remain old things all is well,

For thou art grateful as becomes man best :
And hadst thou only heard me play one tune,
Or viewed me from a window, not so soon
With thee would such things fade as with the rest.

8.

I seem to see ! we meet and part : 'tis brief ;
The book I opened keeps a folded leaf,
The very chair I sat on, breaks the rank ;
That is a portrait of me on the wall—
Three lines, my face comes at so slight a call ;
And for all this, one little hour's to thank.

9.

But now, because the hour through years was fixed,
Because our inmost beings met and mixed,
Because thou once hast loved me—wilt thou dare
Say to thy soul and Who may list beside,
“Therefore she is immortally my bride,
Chance cannot change that love, nor time impair,

10.

“So, what if in the dusk of life that’s left,
I, a tired traveller, of my sun bereft,
Look from my path when, mimicking the same,
The fire-fly glimpses past me, come and gone ?
—Where was it till the sunset ? where anon
It will be at the sunrise ! what’s to blame ? ”

11.

Is it so helpful to thee ? canst thou take
The mimic up, nor, for the true thing’s sake,
Put gently by such efforts at a beam ?
Is the remainder of the way so long
Thou need’st the little solace, thou the strong ?
Watch out thy watch, let weak ones doze and dream !

12.

“—Ah, but the fresher faces ! Is it true,”
Thou’lt ask, “ some eyes are beautiful and new ?

Some hair,—how can one choose but grasp such
And if a man would press his lips to lips [wealth?
Fresh as the wilding hedge-rose-cup there slips
The dew-drop out of, must it be by stealth?

13.

“It cannot change the love kept still for Her,
Much more than, such a picture to prefer
Passing a day with, to a room’s bare side.
The painted form takes nothing she possessed,
Yet while the Titian’s Venus lies at rest
A man looks. Once more, what is there to chide?”

14.

So must I see, from where I sit and watch,
My own self sell myself, my hand attach
Its warrant to the very thefts from me—
Thy singleness of soul that made me proud,
Thy purity of heart I loved aloud,
Thy man’s truth I was bold to bid God see!

15.

Love so, then, if thou wilt! Give all thou canst
Away to the new faces—disentranced—

(Say it and think it) obdurate no more,
Re-issue looks and words from the old mint—
Pass them afresh, no matter whose the print
Image and superscription once they bore!

16.

Re-coin thyself and give it them to spend,—
It all comes to the same thing at the end,
Since mine thou wast, mine art, and mine shalt be,
Faithful or faithless, sealing up the sum
Or lavish of my treasure, thou must come
Back to the heart's place here I keep for thee!

17.

Only, why should it be with stain at all?
Why must I, 'twixt the leaves of coronal,

Put any kiss of pardon on thy brow ?
Why need the other women know so much
And talk together, "Such the look and such
The smile he used to love with, then as now !"

18.

Might I die last and shew thee ! Should I find
Such hardship in the few years left behind,
If free to take and light my lamp, and go
Into thy tomb, and shut the door and sit
Seeing thy face on those four sides of it
The better that they are so blank, I know !

19.

Why, time was what I wanted, to turn o'er
Within my mind each look, get more and more
By heart each word, too much to learn at first,
And join thee all the fitter for the pause
'Neath the low door-way's lintel. That were cause
For lingering, though thou calledst, if I durst !

20.

And yet thou art the nobler of us two.
What dare I dream of, that thou canst not do,
Outstripping my ten small steps with one stride?
I'll say then, here's a trial and a task—
Is it to bear?—if easy, I'll not ask—
Though love fail, I can trust on in thy pride.

21.

Pride?—when those eyes forestal the life behind
The death I have to go through!—when I find,
Now that I want thy help most, all of thee!
What did I fear? Thy love shall hold me fast
Until the little minute's sleep is past
And I wake saved.—And yet, it will not be!

AN EPISTLE
CONTAINING THE
STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF KARSHISH, THE
ARAB PHYSICIAN.

KARSHISH, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
The not-incurious in God's handiwork
(This man's-flesh He hath admirably made,
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
To coop up and keep down on earth a space
That puff of vapour from His mouth, man's soul)
—To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,
Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip

Back and rejoin its source before the term,—
And aptest in contrivance, under God,
To baffle it by deftly stopping such :—
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with
peace)

Three samples of true snake-stone—rarer still,
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,
(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)
And writeth now the twenty-second time.

My journeyings were brought to Jericho,
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art
Shall count a little labour unpaid ?
I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone
On many a flinty furlong of this land.
Also the country-side is all on fire
With rumours of a marching hitherward—
Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.
A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear;

Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls :
I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.
Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,
And once a town declared me for a spy,
But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,
Since this poor covert where I pass the night,
This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence
A man with plague-sores at the third degree
Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here !
'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,
To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip
And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.
A viscid choler is observable
In tertians, I was nearly bold to say,
And falling-sickness hath a happier cure
Than our school wots of : there's a spider here
Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,
Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back ;
Take five and drop them . . . but who knows his mind,
The Syrian run-a-gate I trust this to ?

His service payeth me a sublimate
Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.
Best wait : I reach Jerusalem at morn,
There set in order my experiences,
Gather what most deserves and give thee all—
Or I might add, Judea's gum-tragacanth
Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,
Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,
In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease
Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy—
Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar—
But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay : my Syrian blinketh gratefully,
Protesteth his devotion is my price—
Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal ?
I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
What set me off a-writing first of all.
An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang !
For, be it this town's barrenness—or else

The Man had something in the look of him—
His case has struck me far more than 'tis worth.
So, pardon if—(lest presently I lose
In the great press of novelty at hand
The care and pains this somehow stole from me)
I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,
Almost in sight—for, wilt thou have the truth?
The very man is gone from me but now,
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.
Thus then, and let thy better wit help all.

'Tis but a case of mania—subinduced
By epilepsy, at the turning-point
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days,
When by the exhibition of some drug
Or spell, exorcisation, stroke of art
Unknown to me and which 'twere well to know,
The evil thing out-breaking all at once
Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,—
But, flinging, so to speak, life's gates too wide,

Making a clear house of it too suddenly,
The first conceit that entered pleased to write
Whatever it was minded on the wall
So plainly at that vantage, as it were,
(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent
Attaineth to erase the fancy-scrawls
Which the returned and new-established soul
Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart*
That henceforth she will read or these or none.
And first—the man's own firm conviction rests
That he was dead (in fact they buried him)
That he was dead and then restored to life
By a Nazarene physician of his tribe :
—'Sayeth, the same bade " Rise," and he did rise.
" Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.
Not so this figment!—not, that such a fume,
Instead of giving way to time and health,
Should eat itself into the life of life,
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all !
For see, how he takes up the after-life.

The man—it is one Lazarus a Jew,
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,
The body's habit wholly laudable,
As much, indeed, beyond the common health
As he were made and put aside to shew.
Think, could we penetrate by any drug
And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,
And bring it clear and fair, by three days sleep!
Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?
This grown man eyes the world now like a child.
Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,
Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,
To bear my inquisition. While they spoke,
Now sharply, now with sorrow,—told the case,—
He listened not except I spoke to him,
But folded his two hands and let them talk,
Watching the flies that buzzed : and yet no fool.
And that's a sample how his years must go.
Look if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,
Should find a treasure, can he use the same

With straightened habits and with tastes starved small,
And take at once to his impoverished brain
The sudden element that changes things,
—That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand,
And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust ?
Is he not such an one as moves to mirth—
Warily parsimonious, when's no need,
Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times ?
All prudent counsel as to what befits
The golden mean, is lost on such an one.
The man's fantastic will is the man's law.
So here—we'll call the treasure knowledge, say—
Increased beyond the fleshly faculty—
Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing Heaven.
The man is witless of the size, the sum,
The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much.
Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
Assembled to besiege his city now,

And of the passing of a mule with gourds—
'Tis one! Then take it on the other side,
Speak of some trifling fact—he will gaze rapt
With stupor at its very littleness—
(Far as I see) as if in that indeed
He caught prodigious import, whole results;
And so will turn to us the bystanders
In ever the same stupor (note this point)
That we too see not with his opened eyes!
Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,
Preposterously, at cross purposes.
Should his child sicken unto death,—why, look
For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,
Or pretermission of his daily craft—
While a word, gesture, glance, from that same child
At play or in the school or laid asleep,
Will start him to an agony of fear,
Exasperation, just as like! demand
The reason why—" 'tis but a word," object—
"A gesture"—he regards thee as our lord

Who lived there in the pyramid alone,
Looked at us, dost thou mind, when being young
We both would unadvisedly recite
Some charm's beginning, from that book of his,
Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst
All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.
Thou and the child have each a veil alike
Thrown o'er your heads from under which ye both
Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match
Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know !
He holds on firmly to some thread of life—
(It is the life to lead perforcedly)
Which runs across some vast distracting orb
Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—
The spiritual life around the earthly life !
The law of that is known to him as this—
His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.
So is the man perplexed with impulses
Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,

Proclaiming what is Right and Wrong across—
And not along—this black thread through the blaze—
“It should be” balked by “here it cannot be.”
And oft the man’s soul springs into his face
As if he saw again and heard again
His sage that bade him “Rise” and he did rise.
Something—a word, a tick of the blood within
Admonishes—then back he sinks at once
To ashes, that was very fire before,
In sedulous recurrence to his trade
Whereby he earneth him the daily bread—
And studiously the humbler for that pride,
Professedly the faultier that he knows
God’s secret, while he holds the thread of life.
Indeed the especial marking of the man
Is prone submission to the Heavenly will—
Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.
’Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last
For that same death which will restore his being
To equilibrium, body loosening soul

Divorced even now by premature full growth :
He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live
So long as God please, and just how God please.
He even seeketh not to please God more
(Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.
Hence I perceive not he affects to preach
The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be—
Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do.
How can he give his neighbour the real ground,
His own conviction ? ardent as he is—
Call his great truth a lie, why still the old
“ Be it as God please ” reassureth him.
I probed the sore as thy disciple should—
“ How, beast,” said I, “ this stolid carelessness
Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once ? ”
He merely looked with his large eyes on me.
The man is apathetic, you deduce ?
Contrariwise he loves both old and young,

Able and weak—affects the very brutes
And birds—how say I? flowers of the field—
As a wise workman recognises tools
In a master's workshop, loving what they make.
Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb :
Only impatient, let him do his best,
At ignorance and carelessness and sin—
An indignation which is promptly curbed.
As when in certain travels I have feigned
To be an ignoramus in our art
According to some preconceived design,
And happed to hear the land's practitioners
Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,
Prattle fantastically on disease,
Its cause and cure—and I must hold my peace !

Thou wilt object—why have I not ere this
Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene
Who wrought this cure, enquiring at the source,
Conferring with the frankness that befits ?

Alas ! it grieveth me, the learned leech
Perished in a tumult many years ago,
Accused,—our learning's fate,—of wizardry,
Rebellion, to the setting up a rule
And creed prodigious as described to me.
His death which happened when the earthquake fell
(Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss
To occult learning in our lord the sage
That lived there in the pyramid alone)
Was wrought by the mad people—that's their wont—
On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,
To his tried virtue, for miraculous help—
How could he stop the earthquake ? That's their way !
The other imputations must be lies :
But take one—though I loathe to give it thee,
In mere respect to any good man's fame !
(And after all our patient Lazarus
Is stark mad—should we count on what he says ?
Perhaps not—though in writing to a leech
'Tis well to keep back nothing of a case.)

This man so cured regards the curer then,
As—God forgive me—who but God himself,
Creator and Sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
—'Sayeth that such an One was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,
And must have so avouched himself, in fact,
In hearing of this very Lazarus
Who saith—but why all this of what he saith?
Why write of trivial matters, things of price
Calling at every moment for remark?
I noticed on the margin of a pool
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,
Which, now that I review it, needs must seem
Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth.

Nor I myself discern in what is writ
Good cause for the peculiar interest
And awe indeed this man has touched me with.
Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness
Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus—
I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
Like an old lion's cheek-teeth. Out there came
A moon made like a face with certain spots
Multiform, manifold, and menacing :
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met
In this old sleepy town at unaware,
The man and I. I send thee what is writ.
Regard it as a chance, a matter risked
To this ambiguous Syrian—he may lose,
Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.
Jerusalem's repose shall make amends
For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine,
Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell !

The very God ! think, Abib ; dost thou think ?

So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself.
Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee!"
The madman saith He said so : it is strange.

MESMERISM.

1.

ALL I believed is true !

I am able yet¹

All I want to get

By a method as strange as new :

Dare I trust the same to you ?

2.

If at night, when doors are shut,

And the wood-worm picks,

And the death-watch ticks,

And the bar has a flag of smut,

And a cat's in the water-butt—

3.

And the socket floats and flares,
And the house-beams groan,
And a foot unknown
Is surmised on the garret-stairs,
And the locks slip unawares—

4.

And the spider, to serve his ends,
By a sudden thread,
Arms and legs outspread,
On the table's midst descends,
Comes to find, God knows what friends!—

5.

If since eve drew in, I say,
I have sate and brought
(So to speak) my thought
To bear on the woman away,
Till I felt my hair turn grey—

6.

Till I seemed to have and hold
In the vacancy
'Twixt the wall and me,
From the hair-plait's chestnut-gold
To the foot in its muslin fold—

7.

Have and hold, then and there,
Her, from head to foot,
Breathing and mute,
Passive and yet aware,
In the grasp of my steady stare—

8.

Hold and have, there and then,
All her body and soul
That completes my Whole,
All that women add to men,
In the clutch of my steady ken—

9.

Having and holding, till
I imprint her fast
On the void at last
As the sun does whom he will
By the calotypist's skill—

10.

Then,—if my heart's strength serve,
And through all and each
Of the veils I reach
To her soul and never swerve,
Knitting an iron nerve—

11.

Commanding that to advance
And inform the shape
Which has made escape
And before my countenance
Answers me glance for glance—

12.

I, still with a gesture fit
Of my hands that best
Do my soul's behest,
Pointing the power from it,
While myself do steadfast sit—

13.

Steadfast and still the same
On my object bent
While the hands give vent
To my ardour and my aim
And break into very flame—

14.

Then, I reach, I must believe,
Not her soul in vain,
For to me again
It reaches, and past retrieve
Is wound in the toils I weave—

15.

And must follow as I require,
As befits a thrall,
Bringing flesh and all,
Essence and earth-attire,
To the source of the tractile fire—

16.

Till the house called hers, not mine,
With a growing weight
Seems to suffocate
If she break not its leaden line
And escape from its close confine—

17.

Out of doors into the night !
On to the maze
Of the wild wood-ways,
Not turning to left or right
From the pathway, blind with sight—

18.

Making thro' rain and wind
O'er the broken shrubs,
'Twixt the stems and stubs,
With a still composed strong mind,
Not a care for the world behind—

19.

Swifter and still more swift,
As the crowding peace
Doth to joy increase
In the wide blind eyes uplift,
Thro' the darkness and the drift!

20.

While I—to the shape, I too
Feel my soul dilate
Nor a whit abate
And relax not a gesture due
As I see my belief come true—

21.

For there ! have I drawn or no
Life to that lip ?
Do my fingers dip
In a flame which again they throw
On the cheek that breaks a-glow ?

22.

Ha ! was the hair so first ?
What, unfilleted,
Made alive, and spread
Through the void with a rich outburst,
Chestnut gold-interspersed !

23.

Like the doors of a casket-shrine,
See, on either side,
Her two arms divide
Till the heart betwixt makes sign,
Take me, for I am thine !

24.

Now—now—the door is heard
Hark ! the stairs and near—
Nearer—and here—
Now ! and at call the third
She enters without a word.

25.

On doth she march and on
To the fancied shape—
It is past escape
Herself, now—the dream is done
And the shadow and she are one.

26.

First I will pray. Do Thou
That ownest the soul,
Yet wilt grant controul
To another nor disallow
For a time, restrain me now !

27.

I admonish me while I may,
Not to squander guilt,
Since require Thou wilt
At my hand its price one day!
What the price is, who can say?

A SERENADE AT THE VILLA.

1.

THAT was I, you heard last night
When there rose no moon at all,
Nor, to pierce the strained and tight
Tent of heaven, a planet small :
Life was dead, and so was light.

2.

Not a twinkle from the fly,
Not a glimmer from the worm.
When the crickets stopped their cry,
When the owls forbore a term,
You heard music ; that was I.

3.

Earth turned in her sleep with pain,
Sultrily suspired for proof :
In at heaven and out again,
Lightning !—where it broke the roof,
Bloodlike, some few drops of rain.

4.

What they could my words expressed,
O my love, my all, my one !
Singing helped the verses best,
And when singing's best was done,
To my lute I left the rest.

5.

So wore night ; the east was grey,
White the broad-faced hemlock flowers ;
Soon would come another day ;
Ere its first of heavy hours
Found me, I had past away.

6.

What became of all the hopes,
Words and song and lute as well ?
Say, this struck you—"When life gropes
Feebly for the path where fell
Light last on the evening slopes,

7.

"One friend in that path shall be
To secure my steps from wrong;
One to count night day for me,
Patient through the watches long,
Serving most with none to see."

8.

Never say—as something bodes—
"So the worst has yet a worse !
When life halts 'neath double loads,
Better the task-master's curse
Than such music on the roads !

9.

“ When no moon succeeds the sun,
Nor can pierce the midnight’s tent
Any star, the smallest one,
While some drops, where lightning went,
Show the final storm begun—

10.

“ When the fire-fly hides its spot,
When the garden-voices fail
In the darkness thick and hot,—
Shall another voice avail,
That shape be where those are not ?

11.

“ Has some plague a longer lease
Proffering its help uncouth ?
Can’t one even die in peace ?
As one shuts one’s eyes on youth,
Is that face the last one sees ? ”

12.

Oh, how dark your villa was,
Windows fast and obdurate !
How the garden grudged me grass
Where I stood—the iron gate
Ground its teeth to let me pass !

MY STAR.



ALL that I know
Of a certain star,
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue,
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue !
Then it stops like a bird,—like a flower, hangs furled ;
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world ?
Mine has opened its soul to me ; therefore I love it.

INSTANS TYRANNUS.



1.

OF the million or two, more or less,
I rule and possess,
One man, for some cause undefined,
Was least to my mind.

2.

I struck him, he grovelled of course—
For, what was his force?
I pinned him to earth with my weight
And persistence of hate—

And he lay, would not moan, would not curse,
As if lots might be worse.

3.

“Were the object less mean, would he stand
At the swing of my hand !
For obscurity helps him and blots
The hole where he squats.”
So I set my five wits on the stretch
To inveigle the wretch.
All in vain ! gold and jewels I threw,
Still he couched there perdue.
I tempted his blood and his flesh,
Hid in roses my mesh,
Choicest cates and the flagon’s best spilth—
Still he kept to his filth !

4.

Had he kith now or kin, were access
To his heart, if I press—

Just a son or a mother to seize—
No such booty as these!
Were it simply a friend to pursue
'Mid my million or two,
Who could pay me in person or pelf
What he owes me himself.
No! I could not but smile through my chafe—
For the fellow lay safe
As his mates do, the midge and the nit,
—Through minuteness, to wit.

5.

Then a humor more great took its place
At the thought of his face,
The droop, the low cares of the mouth,
The trouble uncouth
'Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain
To put out of its pain—
And, no, I admonished myself,
“Is one mocked by an elf,

Is one baffled by toad or by rat ?
The gravamen's in that !
How the lion, who crouches to suit
His back to my foot,
Would admire that I stand in debate !
But the Small is the Great
If it vexes you,—that is the thing !
Toad or rat vex the King ?
Though I waste half my realm to unearth
Toad or rat, 'tis well worth !”

6.

So I soberly laid my last plan
To extinguish the man.
Round his creep-hole,—with never a break
Ran my fires for his sake ;
Over-head, did my thunders combine
With my under-ground mine :
Till I looked from my labor content
To enjoy the event.

7.

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end ?
Did I say "without friend ?"
Say rather, from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his targe
With the sun's self for visible boss,
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
Where the wretch was safe prest !
Do you see ? just my vengeance complete,
The man sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed !
—So, *I* was afraid !

A PRETTY WOMAN.

1.

THAT fawn-skin-dappled hair of hers,
And the blue eye
Dear and dewy,
And that infantine fresh air of hers !

2.

To think men cannot take you, Sweet,
And enfold you,
Ay, and hold you,
And so keep you what they make you, Sweet !

3.

You like us for a glance, you know—

For a word's sake,

Or a sword's sake,

All's the same, whate'er the chance, you know.

4.

And in turn we make you ours, we say—

You and youth too,

Eyes and mouth too,

All the face composed of flowers, we say.

5.

All's our own, to make the most of, Sweet—

Sing and say for,

Watch and pray for,

Keep a secret or go boast of, Sweet.

6.

But for loving, why, you would not, Sweet,
Though we prayed you,
Paid you, brayed you
In a mortar—for you could not, Sweet.

7.

So, we leave the sweet face fondly there—
Be its beauty
Its sole duty !
Let all hope of grace beyond, lie there !

8.

And while the face lies quiet there,
Who shall wonder
That I ponder
A conclusion ? I will try it there.

9.

As,—why must one, for the love forgone,
Scout mere liking ?
Thunder-striking
Earth,—the heaven, we looked above for, gone !

10.

Why with beauty, needs there money be—
Love with liking ?
Crush the fly-king
In his gauze, because no honey bee ?

11.

May not liking be so simple-sweet,
If love grew there
'Twould undo there
All that breaks the cheek to dimples sweet ?

12.

Is the creature too imperfect, say ?

Would you mend it

And so end it ?

Since not all addition perfects aye !

13.

Or is it of its kind, perhaps,

Just perfection—

Whence, rejection

Of a grace not to its mind, perhaps ?

14.

Shall we burn up, tread that face at once

Into tinder,

And so hinder

Sparks from kindling all the place at once ?

15.

Or else kiss away one's soul on her ?

Your love-fancies !—

A sick man sees

Truer, when his hot eyes roll on her !

16.

Thus the craftsman thinks to grace the rose,—

Plucks a mould-flower

For his gold flower,

Uses fine things that efface the rose.

17.

Rosy rubies make its cup more rose,

Precious metals

Ape the petals,—

Last, some old king locks it up, morose !

18.

Then, how grace a rose? I know a way!

Leave it rather.

Must you gather?

Smell, kiss, wear it—at last, throw away!

"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME."

(See Edgar's Song in "LEAR.")



1.

MY first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee that pursed and scored
Its edge at one more victim gained thereby.

2.

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare

All travellers that might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

3.

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed ; neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end desried,
So much as gladness that some end should be.

4.

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,—
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

5.

As when a sick man very near to death
Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,
And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
Freelier outside, ("since all is o'er," he saith,
"And the blow fall'n no grieving can amend")

6.

While some discuss if near the other graves
Be room enough for this, and when a day
Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
With care about the banners, scarves and staves,—
And still the man hears all, and only craves
He may not shame such tender love and stay.

7.

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ

So many times among "The Band"—to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now—should I be fit.

8.

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
That hateful cripple, out of his highway
Into the path he pointed. All the day
Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

9.

For mark ! no sooner was I fairly found
Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
Than pausing to throw backward a last view
To the safe road, 'twas gone ! grey plain all round !
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
I might go on ; nought else remained to do.

10.

So on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved ignoble nature ; nothing thrive :
For flowers—as well expect a cedar grove !
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
You'd think : a burr had been a treasure-trove.

11.

No ! penury, inertness, and grimace,
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. " See
Or shut your eyes "—said Nature peevishly—
" It nothing skills : I cannot help my case :
The Judgment's fire alone can cure this place,
Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

12.

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped—the bents

Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves—bruised as to baulk
All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.

13.

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy—thin dry blades pricked the mud.
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupified, however he came there—
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

14.

Alive? he might be dead for all I know,
With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain,
And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane.
Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe:
I never saw a brute I hated so—
He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

15.

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art :
One taste of the old times sets all to rights !

16.

Not it ! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
An arm in mine to fix me to the place,
That way he used. Alas ! one night's disgrace !
Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

17.

Giles, then, the soul of honour—there he stands
Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.

What honest men should dare (he said) he durst.
Good—but the scene shifts—faugh ! what hangman's
Pin to his breast a parchment ? his own bands [hands
Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst !

18.

Better this present than a past like that—
Back therefore to my darkening path again.
No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
Will the night send a howlet or a bat ?
I asked : when something on the dismal flat
Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

19.

A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes.
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms—
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

20.

So petty yet so spiteful ! all along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it ;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng :
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

21.

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard !
—It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But, ugh ! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

22.

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
Now for a better country. Vain presage !

Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage
Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
Soil to a plash? toads in a poisoned tank,
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

23.

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.
What kept them there, with all the plain to choose?
No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
None out of it: mad brewage set to work
Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk
Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

24.

And more than that—a furlong on—why, there!
What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,
Or brake, not wheel—that harrow fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air
Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

25.

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
Desperate and done with ; (so a fool finds mirth,
Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
Changes and off he goes !) within a rood
Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

26.

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
Broke into moss or substances like boils ;
Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

27.

And just as far as ever from the end !
Nought in the distance but the evening, nought

To point my footstep further ! At the thought,
A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,
Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sought.

28.

For looking up, aware I somehow grew,
'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
All round to mountains—with such name to grace
Mere ugly heights and heaps now stol'n in view.
How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you !
How to get from them was no plainer case.

29.

Yet half I seemed to recognise some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when—
In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress this way. When, in the very nick
Of giving up, one time more, came a click
As when a trap shuts—you're inside the den !

30.

Burningly it came on me all at once,
This was the place ! those two hills on the right
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight—
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Duncce,
Fool, to be dozing at the very nonce,
After a life spent training for the sight !

31.

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself ?
The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

32.

Not see ? because of night perhaps ?—Why, day
Came back again for that ! before it left,

The dying sunset kindled through a cleft :
 The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay—
 Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—
 "Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!"

33.

Not hear? when noise was everywhere? it tolled
 Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears,
 Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—
 How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
 And such was fortunate, yet each of old
 Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

34.

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides—met
 To view the last of me, a living frame
 For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
 I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
 Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set
 And blew. "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*"

RESPECTABILITY.



1.

DEAR, had the world in its caprice
Deigned to proclaim "I know you both,
Have recognised your plighted troth,
Am sponsor for you—live in peace!"—
How many precious months and years
Of youth had passed, that speed so fast,
Before we found it out at last,
The world, and what it fears?

2.

How much of priceless life were spent
With men that every virtue decks,
And women models of their sex,
Society's true ornament,—
Ere we dared wander, nights like this,
Thro' wind and rain, and watch the Seine,
And feel the Boulevart break again
To warmth and light and bliss ?

3.

I know ! the world proscribes not love ;
Allows my finger to caress
Your lip's contour and downiness,
Provided it supply a glove.
The world's good word !—the Institute !
Guizot receives Montalembert !
Eh ? down the court three lampions flare—
Put forward your best foot !

A LIGHT WOMAN.



1.

So far as our story approaches the end,
Which do you pity the most of us three?—
My friend, or the mistress of my friend
With her wanton eyes, or me?

2.

My friend was already too good to lose,
And seemed in the way of improvement yet,
When she crossed his path with her hunting-noose
And over him drew her net.

3.

When I saw him tangled in her toils,
A shame, said I, if she adds just him
To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
The hundredth, for a whim !

4.

And before my friend be wholly hers,
How easy to prove to him, I said,
An eagle's the game her pride prefers,
Though she snaps at the wren instead !

5.

So I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
My hand sought hers as in earnest need,
And round she turned for my noble sake,
And gave me herself indeed.

6.

The eagle am I, with my fame in the world,
The wren is he, with his maiden face.
—You look away and your lip is curled?
Patience, a moment's space!

7.

For see—my friend goes shaking and white;
He eyes me as the basilisk:
I have turned, it appears, his day to night,
Eclipsing his sun's disc.

8.

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief:
“Though I love her—that he comprehends—
One should master one's passions, (love, in chief)
And be loyal to one's friends!”

9.

And she,—she lies in my hand as tame

As a pear hung basking over a wall ;

Just a touch to try and off it came ;

'Tis mine,—can I let it fall ?

10.

With no mind to eat it, that's the worst !

Were it thrown in the road, would the case assist ?

'Twas quenching a dozen blue-flies' thirst

When I gave its stalk a twist.

11.

And I,—what I seem to my friend, you see—

What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess.

What I seem to myself, do you ask of me ?

No hero, I confess.

12.

'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own.
Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
He played with for bits of stone !

13.

One likes to show the truth for the truth ;
That the woman was light is very true :
But suppose she says,—never mind that youth—
What wrong have I done to you ?

14.

Well, any how, here the story stays,
So far at least as I understand ;
And, Robert Browning, you writer of plays,
Here's a subject made to your hand !

THE STATUE AND THE BUST.



THERE'S a palace in Florence, the world knows well,
And a statue watches it from the square,
And this story of both do the townsmen tell.

Ages ago, a lady there,
At the farthest window facing the east
Asked, "Who rides by with the royal air?"

The brides-maids' prattle around her ceased;
She leaned forth, one on either hand;
They saw how the blush of the bride increased—

They felt by its beats her heart expand—
As one at each ear and both in a breath
Whispered, "The Great-Duke Ferdinand."

That selfsame instant, underneath,
The Duke rode past in his idle way,
Empty and fine like a swordless sheath.

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,
Till he threw his head back—"Who is she?"
—"A Bride the Riccardi brings home to-day."

• Hair in heaps laid heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure—
Carved like the heart of the coal-black tree,

Crisped like a war-steed's encolure—
Which vainly sought to dissemble her eyes
Of the blackest black our eyes endure.

And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise
Filled the fine empty sheath of a man,—
The Duke grew straightway brave and wise.

He looked at her, as a lover can ;
She looked at him, as one who awakes,—
The past was a sleep, and her life began.

As love so ordered for both their sakes,
A feast was held that selfsame night
In the pile which the mighty shadow makes.

(For Via Larga is three-parts light,
But the Palace overshadows one,
Because of a crime which may God requite !

To Florence and God the wrong was done,
Through the first republic's murder there
By Cosimo and his cursed son.)

The Duke (with the statue's face in the square)
Turned in the midst of his multitude
At the bright approach of the bridal pair.

Face to face the lovers stood
A single minute and no more,
While the bridegroom bent as a man subdued—

Bowed till his bonnet brushed the floor—
For the Duke on the lady a kiss conferred,
As the courtly custom was of yore.

In a minute can lovers exchange a word ?
If a word did pass, which I do not think,
Only one out of the thousand heard.

That was the bridegroom. At day's brink
He and his bride were alone at last
In a bed-chamber by a taper's blink.

Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalk repassed.

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,
Through a certain window facing the east
She might watch like a convent's chronicler.

Since passing the door might lead to a feast,
And a feast might lead to so much beside,
He, of many evils, chose the least.

"Freely I choose too," said the bride—
"Your window and its world suffice."
So replied the tongue, while the heart replied—

"If I spend the night with that devil twice,
May his window serve as my loop of hell
Whence a damned soul looks on Paradise!

“ I fly to the Duke who loves me well,
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
Ere I count another ave-bell.

“ ’Tis only the coat of a page to borrow,
And tie my hair in a horse-boy’s trim,
And I save my soul—but not to-morrow”—

(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)—
“ My father tarries to bless my state :
I must keep it one day more for him.

“ Is one day more so long to wait ?
Moreover the Duke rides past, I know—
We shall see each other, sure as fate.”

She turned on her side and slept. Just so !
So we resolve on a thing and sleep.
So did the lady, ages ago.

That night the Duke said, " Dear or cheap
As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove
To body or soul, I will drain it deep."

And on the morrow, bold with love,
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,
As his duty bade, by the Duke's alcove)

And smiled " 'Twas a very funeral
Your lady will think, this feast of ours,—
A shame to efface, whate'er befall !

" What if we break from the Arno bowers,
And let Petraja, cool and green,
Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers ?"

The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,
Said, " Too much favour for me so mean !

“Alas! my lady leaves the south.
Each wind that comes from the Apennine
Is a menace to her tender youth.

“No way exists, the wise opine,
If she quits her palace twice this year,
To avert the flower of life’s decline.”

Quoth the Duke, “A sage and a kindly fear.
Moreover Petraja is cold this spring—
Be our feast to-night as usual here!”

And then to himself—“Which night shall bring
Thy bride to her lover’s embraces, fool—
Or I am the fool, and thou art his king!

“Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool—
For to-night the Envoy arrives from France,
Whose heart I unlock with thyself, my tool.

“ I need thee still and might miss perchance.
To-day is not wholly lost, beside,
With its hope of my lady’s countenance—

“ For I ride—what should I do but ride ?
And passing her palace, if I list,
May glance at its window—well betide ! ”

So said, so done : nor the lady missed
One ray that broke from the ardent brow,
Nor a curl of the lips where the spirit kissed.

Be sure that each renewed the vow,
No morrow’s sun should arise and set
And leave them then as it left them now.

But next day passed, and next day yet,
With still fresh cause to wait one more
Ere each leaped over the parapet.

And still, as love's brief morning wore,
With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,
They found love not as it seemed before.

They thought it would work infallibly,
But not in despite of heaven and earth—
The rose would blow when the storm passed by.

Meantime they could profit in winter's dearth
By winter's fruits that supplant the rose :
The world and its ways have a certain worth !

And to press a point while these oppose
Were a simple policy—best wait,
And lose no friends and gain no foes.

Meanwhile, worse fates than a lover's fate,
Who daily may ride and lean and look
Where his lady watches behind the grate !

And she—she watched the square like a book
Holding one picture and only one,
Which daily to find she undertook.

When the picture was reached the book was done,
And she turned from it all night to scheme
Of tearing it out for herself next sun.

Weeks grew months, years—gleam by gleam
The glory dropped from youth and love,
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream,

Which hovered as dreams do, still above,—
But who can take a dream for truth ?
Oh, hide our eyes from the next remove !

One day as the lady saw her youth
Depart, and the silver thread that streaked
Her hair, and, worn by the serpent's tooth,

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked,—
And wondered who the woman was,
So hollow-eyed and haggard-cheeked,

Fronting her silent in the glass—
“Summon here,” she suddenly said,
“Before the rest of my old self pass,

“Him, the Carver, a hand to aid,
Who moulds the clay no love will change,
And fixes a beauty never to fade.

“Let Robbia’s craft so apt and strange
Arrest the remains of young and fair,
And rivet them while the seasons range.

“Make me a face on the window there
Waiting as ever, mute the while,
My love to pass below in the square!

“And let me think that it may beguile
Dreary days which the dead must spend
Down in their darkness under the aisle—

“To say,—‘What matters at the end?
I did no more while my heart was warm,
Than does that image, my pale-faced friend.’

“Where is the use of the lip’s red charm,
The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
And the blood that blues the inside arm—

Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
The earthly gift to an end divine?
A lady of clay is as good, I trow.”

But long ere Robbia’s cornice, fine
With flowers and fruits which leaves enlase,
Was set where now is the empty shrine—

(With, leaning out of a bright blue space,
As a ghost might from a chink of sky,
The passionate pale lady's face—

Eyeing ever with earnest eye
And quick-turned neck at its breathless stretch,
Some one who ever passes by—)

The Duke sighed like the simplest wretch
In Florence, "So, my dream escapes !
Will its record stay ?" And he bade them fetch

Some subtle fashioner of shapes—
"Can the soul, the will, die out of a man
Ere his body find the grave that gapes ?

"John of Douay shall work my plan,
Mould me on horseback here aloft,
Alive—(the subtle artisan !)

“ In the very square I cross so oft !
That men may admire, when future suns
Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,

“ While the mouth and the brow are brave in bronze—
Admire and say, ‘ When he was alive, .
How he would take his pleasure once ! ’

“ And it shall go hard but I contrive
To listen meanwhile and laugh in my tomb
At indolence which aspires to strive.”

So ! while these wait the trump of doom,
How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
Nights and days in the narrow room ?

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
What a gift life was, ages ago,
Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Surely they see not God, I know,
Nor all that chivalry of His,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had cut his way thro' the world to this.

I hear your reproach—"But delay was best,
For their end was a crime!"—Oh, a crime will do
As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment's view.

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf?
Where a button goes, 'twere an epigram
To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

The true has no value beyond the sham.
As well the counter as coin, I submit,
When your table's a hat, and your prize, a dram.

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as truly, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play—is my principle !
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will !

The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin :
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Was, the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a crime, I say.
You of the virtue, (we issue join)
How strive you ? *De te, fabula !*

LOVE IN A LIFE.



1.

Room after room,
I hunt the house through
We inhabit together.
Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her,
Next time, herself!—not the trouble behind her
Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew,—
Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

2.

Yet the day wears,
And door succeeds door;
I try the fresh fortune—
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
Still the same chance! she goes out as I enter.
Spend my whole day in the quest,—who cares?
But 'tis twilight, you see,—with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!

LIFE IN A LOVE.

ESCAPE me ?

Never—

Beloved !

While I am I, and you are you,

So long as the world contains us both,

Me the loving and you the loth,

While the one eludes, must the other pursue.

My life is a fault at last, I fear—

It seems too much like a fate, indeed !

Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed—

But what if I fail of my purpose here ?

It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And baffled, get up to begin again,—
So the chace takes up one's life, that's all.
While, look but once from your farthest bound,
At me so deep in the dust and dark,
No sooner the old hope drops to ground
Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,
I shape me—
Ever
Removed !

HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY.



I ONLY knew one poet in my life :

And this, or something like it, was his way.

You saw go up and down Valladolid,
A man of mark, to know next time you saw.
His very serviceable suit of black
Was courtly once and conscientious still,
And many might have worn it, though none did :
The cloak that somewhat shone and shewed the threads,
Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.
He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane,
Scenting the world, looking it full in face,

An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.
They turned up, now, the alley by the church,
That leads no whither ; now, they breathed themselves
On the main promenade just at the wrong time.
You'd come upon his scrutinising hat,
Making a peaked shade blacker than itself
Against the single window spared some house
Intact yet with its mouldered Moorish work,—
Or else surprise the ferrel of his stick
Trying the mortar's temper 'tween the chinks
Of some new shop a-building, French and fine.
He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,
The man who slices lemons into drink,
The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys
That volunteer to help him turn its winch.
He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,
And fly-leaf ballads on the vendor's string,
And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.
He took such cognisance of men and things,
If any beat a horse, you felt he saw ;

If any cursed a woman, he took note ;
Yet stared at nobody,—they stared at him,
And found, less to their pleasure than surprise,
He seemed to know them and expect as much.
So, next time that a neighbour's tongue was loosed,
It marked the shameful and notorious fact,
We had among us, not so much a spy,
As a recording chief-inquisitor,
The town's true master if the town but knew !
We merely kept a Governor for form,
While this man walked about and took account
Of all thought, said, and acted, then went home,
And wrote it fully to our Lord the King
Who has an itch to know things, He knows why,
And reads them in His bed-room of a night.
Oh, you might smile ! there wanted not a touch,
A tang of . . . well, it was not wholly ease
As back into your mind the man's look came—
Stricken in years a little,—such a brow
His eyes had to live under !—clear as flint

On either side the formidable nose
Curved, cut, and coloured, like an eagle's claw.
Had he to do with A.'s surprising fate?
When altogether old B. disappeared
And young C. got his mistress,—was't our friend,
His letter to the King, that did it all?
What paid the bloodless man for so much pains?
Our Lord the King has favourites manifold,
And shifts his ministry some once a month;
Our city gets new Governors at whiles,—
But never word or sign, that I could hear,
Notified to this man about the streets
The King's approval of those letters conned
The last thing duly at the dead of night.
Did the man love his office? frowned our Lord,
Exhorting when none heard—"Beseech me not!
Too far above my people,—beneath Me!
I set the watch,—how should the people know?
Forget them, keep Me all the more in mind!"
Was some such understanding 'twixt the Two?

I found no truth in one report at least—
That if you tracked him to his home, down lanes
Beyond the Jewry, and as clean to pace,
You found he ate his supper in a room
Blazing with lights, four Titians on the wall,
And twenty naked girls to change his plate!
Poor man, he lived another kind of life
In that new, stuccoed, third house by the bridge,
Fresh-painted, rather smart than otherwise!
The whole street might o'erlook him as he sat,
Leg crossing leg, one foot on the dog's back,
Playing a decent cribbage with his maid
(Jacynth, you're sure her name was) o'er the cheese
And fruit, three red halves of starved winter-pears,
Or treat of radishes in April! nine—
Ten, struck the church clock, straight to bed went he.

My father, like the man of sense he was,
Would point him out to me a dozen times;
“St—St,” he'd whisper, “the Corregidor!”

I had been used to think that personage
Was one with lacquered breeches, lustrous belt,
And feathers like a forest in his hat,
Who blew a trumpet and proclaimed the news,
Announced the bull-fights, gave each church its turn,
And memorized the miracle in vogue !
He had a great observance from us boys—
I was in error ; that was not the man.

I'd like now, yet had haply been afraid,
To have just looked, when this man came to die,
And seen who lined the clean gay garret's sides
And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,
With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.
Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,
Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and death,
Doing the King's work all the dim day long,
In his old coat, and up to his knees in mud,
Smoked like a herring, dining on a crust,—
And now the day was won, relieved at once !

No further show or need for that old coat,
You are sure, for one thing ! Bless us, all the while
How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I !
A second, and the angels alter that.
Well, I could never write a verse,—could you ?
Let's to the Prado and make the most of time.

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER.



1.

I SAID—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all my life seemed meant for, fails,
 Since this was written and needs must be—
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness !
Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
Only a memory of the same,
—And this beside, if you will not blame,
 Your leave for one more last ride with me.

2.

My mistress bent that brow of hers,
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two

With life or death in the balance—Right!
The blood replenished me again :
My last thought was at least not vain.
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So one day more am I deified.

Who knows but the world may end to-night ?

3.

Hush ! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions—sun's
And moon's and evening-star's at once—

And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too
Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—
Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

4.

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.

What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated,—who can tell?
Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

5.

Fail I alone, in words and deeds ?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds ?
We rode ; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
 As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought, All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty Done the Undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past !
 I hoped she would love me. Here we ride.

6.

What hand and brain went ever paired ?
What heart alike conceived and dared ?
What act proved all its thought had been ?
What will but felt the fleshly screen ?

We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach.
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each !
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing ! what atones ?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.

7.

What does it all mean, poet ? well,
Your brain's beat into rhythm—you tell
What we felt only ; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much—but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men ?
Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme ?
Sing, riding's a joy ! For me, I ride.

8.

And you, great sculptor—so you gave
A score of years to art, her slave,
And that's your Venus—whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!

You acquiesce and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you, grown grey
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
“Greatly his opera's strains intend,
“But in music we know how fashions end!”

I gave my youth—but we ride, in fine.

9.

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being; had I signed the bond—
Still one must lead some life beyond,

—Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest—
Earth being so good, would Heaven seem best?
Now, Heaven and she are beyond this ride.

10.

And yet—she has not spoke so long!
What if Heaven be, that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two,
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity,—
And Heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

THE PATRIOT.

AN OLD STORY



1.

It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad.
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day !

2.

The air broke into a mist with bells,
The old walls rocked with the crowds and cries.
Had I said, " Good folks, mere noise repels—
But give me your sun from yonder skies ! "
They had answered, " And afterward, what else ? "

3.

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun,
To give it my loving friends to keep.
Nought man could do, have I left undone
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

4.

There's nobody on the house-tops now—
Just a palsied few at the windows set —
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

5.

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind,
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

6.

Thus I entered Brescia, and thus I go !

In such triumphs, people have dropped down dead.

“Thou, paid by the World,—what dost thou owe

Me ?” God might have questioned: but now in-
stead

’Tis God shall requite ! I am safer so.

MASTER HUGUES OF SAXE-GOTHA.



1.

HIST, but a word, fair and soft !

Forth and be judged, Master Hugues !

Answer the question I've put you so oft—

What do you mean by your mountainous fugues ?
See, we're alone in the loft,

2.

I, the poor organist here,

Hugues, the composer of note—

Dead, though, and done with, this many a year—

Let's have a colloquy, something to quote,
Make the world prick up its ear !

3.

See, the church empties a-pace.

Fast they extinguish the lights—

Hallo, there, sacristan ! five minutes' grace !

Here's a crank pedal wants setting to rights,

Baulks one of holding the base.

4.

See, our huge house of the sounds

Hushing its hundreds at once,

Bids the last loiterer back to his bounds

—Oh, you may challenge them, not a response

Get the church saints on their rounds !

5.

(Saints go their rounds, who shall doubt ?

—March, with the moon to admire,

Up nave, down chancel, turn transept about,

Supervise all betwixt pavement and spire,

Put rats and mice to the rout—

6.

Aloys and Jurien and Just—

Order things back to their place,
Have a sharp eye lest the candlesticks rust,
Rub the church plate, darn the sacrament lace,
Clear the desk velvet of dust.)

7.

Here's your book, younger folks shelve !

Played I not off-hand and runningly,
Just now, your masterpiece, hard number twelve ?

Here's what should strike,—could one handle it
Help the axe, give it a helve ! [cunningly.

8.

Page after page as I played,

Every bar's rest where one wipes
Sweat from one's brow, I looked up and surveyed
O'er my three claviers, yon forest of pipes
Whence you still peeped in the shade.

9.

Sure you were wishful to speak,
You, with brow ruled like a score,
Yes, and eyes buried in pits on each cheek,
Like two great breves as they wrote them of yore
Each side that bar, your straight beak !

10.

Sure you said—" Good, the mere notes !
Still, couldst thou take my intent,
Know what procured me our Company's votes—
Masters being lauded and sciolists shent,
Parted the sheep from the goats ! "

11.

Well then, speak up, never flinch !
Quick, ere my candle's a snuff
—Burnt, do you see ? to its uttermost inch—
I believe in you, but that's not enough.
Give my conviction a clinch !

12.

First you deliver your phrase

—Nothing propound, that I see,

Fit in itself for much blame or much praise—

Answered no less, where no answer needs be :

Off start the Two on their ways !

13.

Straight must a Third interpose,

Volunteer needlessly help—

In strikes a Fourth, a Fifth thrusts in his nose,

So the cry's open, the kennel's a-yelp,

Argument's hot to the close !

14.

One disertates, he is candid—

Two must discept,—has distinguished !

Three helps the couple, if ever yet man did :

Four protests, Five makes a dart at the thing wished—

Back to One, goes the case bandied !

15.

One says his say with a difference—

More of expounding, explaining!

All now is wrangle, abuse, and vociferance—

Now there's a truce, all's subdued, self-restraining—

Five, though, stands out all the stiffer hence.

16.

One is incisive, corrosive—

Two retorts, nettled, curt, crepitant—

Three makes rejoinder, expansive, explosive—

Four overbears them all, strident and strepitant—

Five . . . O Danaides, O Sieve!

17.

Now, they ply axes and crowbars—

Now, they prick pins at a tissue

Fine as a skein of the casuist Escobar's

Worked on the bone of a lie. To what issue?

Where is our gain at the Two-bars?

18.

Est fuga, volvitur rota !

On we drift. Where looms the dim port ?
One, Two, Three, Four, Five, contribute their quota—
Something is gained, if one caught but the import—
Show it us, Hugues of Saxe-Gotha !

19.

What with affirming, denying,
Holding, risposting, subjoining,
All's like . . . it's like . . . for an instance I'm trying . . .
There ! See our roof, its gilt moulding and groining
Under those spider-webs lying !

20.

So your fugue broadens and thickens,
Greatens and deepens and lengthens,
Till one exclaims—"But where's music, the dickens ?
Blot ye the gold, while your spider-web strengthens,
Blackened to the stoutest of tickens ?"

21.

I for man's effort am zealous.

Prove me such censure's unfounded!

Seems it surprising a lover grows jealous—

Hopes 'twas for something his organ-pipes sounded,
Tiring three boys at the bellows?

22.

Is it your moral of Life?

Such a web, simple and subtle,

Weave we on earth here in impotent strife,

Backward and forward each throwing his shuttle,
Death ending all with a knife?

23.

Over our heads Truth and Nature—

Still our life's zigzags and dodges,

Ins and outs weaving a new legislature—

God's gold just shining its last where that lodges,
Palled beneath Man's usurpature!

24.

So we o'ershroud stars and roses,
Cherub and trophy and garland,
Nothings grow something which quietly closes
Heaven's earnest eye,—not a glimpse of the far land
Gets through our comments and glozes.

25.

Ah, but traditions, inventions,
(Say we and make up a visage)
So many men with such various intentions
Down the past ages must know more than this age!
Leave the web all its dimensions!

26.

Who thinks Hugues wrote for the deaf?
Proved a mere mountain in labour?
Better submit—try again—what's the clef?
'Faith, it's no trifle for pipe and for tabor—
Four flats—the minor in F.

27.

Friend, your fugue taxes the finger.

Learning it once, who would lose it ?

Yet all the while a misgiving will linger—

Truth's golden o'er us although we refuse it—

Nature, thro' dust-clouds we fling her !

28.

Hugues ! I advise *med pænd*

(Counterpoint glares like a Gorgon)

Bid One, Two, Three, Four, Five, clear the arena !

Say the word, straight I unstop the Full-Organ,

Blare out the *mode Palestrina*.

29.

While in the roof, if I'm right there—

... Lo, you, the wick in the socket !

Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there !

Down it dips, gone like a rocket !

What, you want, do you, to come unawares,

Sweeping the church up for first morning-prayers,
And find a poor devil at end of his cares
At the foot of your rotten-planked rat-riddled stairs ?
Do I carry the moon in my pocket ?

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY.

No more wine? then we'll push back chairs and talk.
A final glass for me, tho' : cool, i'faith !
We ought to have our Abbey back, you see.
It's different, preaching in basilicas,
And doing duty in some masterpiece
Like this of brother Pugin's, bless his heart !
I doubt if they're half baked, those chalk rosettes,
Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere ;
It's just like breathing in a lime-kiln : eh ?
These hot long ceremonies of our church
Cost us a little—oh, they pay the price,
You take me—amply pay it ! Now, we'll talk.

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So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.
No deprecation,—nay, I beg you, sir!
Beside 'tis our engagement : don't you know,
I promised, if you'd watch a dinner out,
We'd see truth dawn together ?—truth that peeps
Over the glass's edge when dinner's done,
And body gets its sop and holds its noise
And leaves soul free a little. Now's the time—
'Tis break of day ! You do despise me then.
And if I say, "despise me,"—never fear—
I know you do not in a certain sense—
Not in my arm-chair for example : here,
I well imagine you respect my place
(Status, *entourage*, worldly circumstance)
Quite to its value—very much indeed
—Are up to the protesting eyes of you
In pride at being seated here for once—
You'll turn it to such capital account !
When somebody, through years and years to come,
Hints of the bishop,—names me—that's enough—

"Blougram? I knew him"—(into it you slide)
"Dined with him once, a Corpus Christi Day,
All alone, we two—he's a clever man—
And after dinner,—why, the wine you know,—
Oh, there was wine, and good!—what with the wine...
'Faith, we began upon all sorts of talk!
He's no bad fellow, Blougram—he had seen
Something of mine he relished—some review—
He's quite above their humbug in his heart,
Half-said as much, indeed—the thing's his trade—
I warrant, Blougram's sceptical at times—
How otherwise? I liked him, I confess!"
Che ch'é, my dear sir, as we say at Rome,
Don't you protest now! It's fair give and take;
You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths—
The hand's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays—
You do despise me; your ideal of life
Is not the bishop's—you would not be I—

You would like better to be Goethe, now,
Or Buonaparte—or, bless me, lower still,
Count D'Orsay,—so you did what you preferred,
Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help,
Believed or disbelieved, no matter what,
So long as on that point, whate'er it was,
You loosed your mind, were whole and sole yourself.
—That, my ideal never can include,
Upon that element of truth and worth
Never be based! for say they make me Pope
(They can't—suppose it for our argument)
Why, there I'm at my tether's end—I've reached
My height, and not a height which pleases you.
An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say.
It's like those eerie stories nurses tell,
Of how some actor played Death on a stage
With pasteboard crown, sham orb, and tinsel'd dart,
And called himself the monarch of the world,
Then going in the tire-room afterward
Because the play was done, to shift himself,

Got touched upon the sleeve familiarly
The moment he had shut the closet door
By Death himself. Thus God might touch a Pope
At unawares, ask what his baubles mean,
And whose part he presumed to play just now?
Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true!

So, drawing comfortable breath again,
You weigh and find whatever more or less
I boast of my ideal realised
Is nothing in the balance when opposed
To your ideal, your grand simple life,
Of which you will not realise one jot.
I am much, you are nothing; you would be all,
I would be merely much—you beat me there.

No, friend, you do not beat me,—hearken why.
The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,
Is not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be,—but, finding first

What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means—a very different thing !
No abstract intellectual plan of life
Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,
But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,
May lead within a world which (by your leave)
Is Rome or London—not Fool's-paradise.
Embellish Rome, idealise away,
Make Paradise of London if you can,
You're welcome, nay, you're wise.

A simile !

We mortals cross the ocean of this world
Each in his average cabin of a life—
The best's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.
Now for our six months' voyage—how prepare ?
You come on shipboard with a landsman's list
Of things he calls convenient—so they are !
An India screen is pretty furniture,
A piano-forte is a fine resource,

All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,
The new edition fifty volumes long ;
And little Greek books with the funny type
They get up well at Leipsic fill the next—
Go on ! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes !
And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add !
'Twere pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow
Hang full in face of one where'er one roams,
Since he more than the others brings with him
Italy's self,—the marvellous Modenese !
Yet 'twas not on your list before, perhaps.
—Alas ! friend, here's the agent . . . is't the name ?
The captain, or whoever's master here—
You see him screw his face up ; what's his cry
Ere you set foot on shipboard ? “ Six feet square ! ”
If you won't understand what six feet mean,
Compute and purchase stores accordingly—
And if in pique because he overhauls
Your Jerome, piano and bath, you come on board
Bare—why you cut a figure at the first

While sympathetic landmen see you off;
Not afterwards, when, long ere half seas o'er,
You peep up from your utterly naked boards
Into some snug and well-appointed berth
Like mine, for instance (try the cooler jug—
Put back the other, but don't jog the ice)
And mortified you mutter "Well and good—
He sits enjoying his sea-furniture—
'Tis stout and proper, and there's store of it,
Though I've the better notion, all agree,
Of fitting rooms up! hang the carpenter,
Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances—
I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all!"
And meantime you bring nothing: never mind—
You've proved your artist-nature: what you don't,
You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

Now come, let's backward to the starting place.
See my way: we're two college friends, suppose—
Prepare together for our voyage, then,

Each note and check the other in his work,—
Here's mine, a bishop's outfit; criticise!
What's wrong? why won't you be a bishop too?

Why, first, you don't believe, you don't and can't,
(Not statedly, that is, and fixedly
And absolutely and exclusively)
In any revelation called divine.
No dogmas nail your faith—and what remains
But say so, like the honest man you are?
First, therefore, overhaul theology!
Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,
Must find believing every whit as hard,
And if I do not frankly say as much,
The ugly consequence is clear enough.

Now, wait, my friend: well, I do not believe—
If you'll accept no faith that is not fixed,
Absolute and exclusive, as you say.
(You're wrong—I mean to prove it in due time)

Meanwhile, I know where difficulties lie
I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,
So give up hope accordingly to solve—
(To you, and over the wine). Our dogmas then
With both of us, tho' in unlike degree,
Missing full credence—overboard with them!
I mean to meet you on your own premise—
Good, there go mine in company with yours!

And now what are we? unbelievers both,
Calm and complete, determinately fixed
To-day, to-morrow, and for ever, pray?
You'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think.
In no-wise! all we've gained is, that belief,
As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,
Confounds us like its predecessor. Where's
The gain? how can we guard our unbelief,
Make it bear fruit to us?—the problem here.
Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,

A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as Nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
The grand Perhaps! we look on helplessly,—
There the old misgivings, crooked questions are—
This good God,—what he could do, if he would,
Would, if he could—then must have done long
since :

If so, when, where, and how? some way must be,—
Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
Some sense, in which it might be, after all.
Why not, "The Way, the Truth, the Life?"

—That way

Over the mountain, which who stands upon
Is apt to doubt if it's indeed a road;
While if he views it from the waste itself,

Up goes the line there, plain from base to brow,
Not vague, mistakeable! what's a break or two
Seen from the unbroken desert either side?
And then (to bring in fresh philosophy)
What if the breaks themselves should prove at last
The most consummate of contrivances
To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith,—
And so we stumble at truth's very test?
What have we gained then by our unbelief
But a life of doubt diversified by faith,
For one of faith diversified by doubt.
We called the chess-board white,—we call it black.

“Well,” you rejoin, “the end's no worse, at least,
We've reason for both colours on the board.
Why not confess, then, where I drop the faith
And you the doubt, that I'm as right as you?”

Because, friend, in the next place, this being so,
And both things even,—faith and unbelief

Left to a man's choice,—we'll proceed a step,
Returning to our image, which I like.

A man's choice, yes—but a cabin-passenger's—
The man made for the special life of the world—
Do you forget him? I remember though!
Consult our ship's conditions and you find
One and but one choice suitable to all,
The choice that you unluckily prefer
Turning things topsy-turvy—they or it
Going to the ground. Belief or unbelief
Bears upon life, determines its whole course,
Begins at its beginning. See the world
Such as it is,—you made it not, nor I;
I mean to take it as it is,—and you
Not so you'll take it,—though you get nought else.
I know the special kind of life I like,
What suits the most my idiosyncrasy,
Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit
In power, peace, pleasantness, and length of days.

I find that positive belief does this
For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.
—For you, it does, however—that we'll try!
'Tis clear, I cannot lead my life, at least
Induce the world to let me peaceably,
Without declaring at the outset, " Friends,
I absolutely and peremptorily
Believe! "—I say faith is my waking life.
One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,
We know, but waking's the main point with us,
And my provision's for life's waking part.
Accordingly, I use heart, head and hands
All day, I build, scheme, study and make friends ;
And when night overtakes me, down I lie,
Sleep, dream a little, and get done with it,
The sooner the better, to begin afresh.
What's midnight's doubt before the dayspring's faith ?
You, the philosopher, that disbelieve,
That recognise the night, give dreams their weight—
To be consistent you should keep your bed,

Abstain from healthy acts that prove you a man,

For fear you drowse perhaps at unawares!

And certainly at night you'll sleep and dream,

Live through the day and bustle as you please.

And so you live to sleep as I to wake,

To unbelieve as I to still believe?

Well, and the common sense of the world calls you

Bed-ridden,—and its good things come to me.

Its estimation, which is half the fight,

That's the first cabin-comfort I secure—

The next . . . but you perceive with half an eye!

Come, come, it's best believing, if we can—

You can't but own that.

Next, concede again—

If once we choose belief, on all accounts

We can't be too decisive in our faith,

Conclusive and exclusive in its terms,

To suit the world which gives us the good things.

In every man's career are certain points

Whereon he dares not be indifferent ;
The world detects him clearly, if he is,
As baffled at the game, and losing life.
He may care little or he may care much
For riches, honour, pleasure, work, repose,
Since various theories of life and life's
Success are extant which might easily
Comport with either estimate of these,
And whoso chooses wealth or poverty,
Labour or quiet, is not judged a fool
Because his fellows would choose otherwise.
We let him choose upon his own account
So long as he's consistent with his choice.
But certain points, left wholly to himself,
When once a man has arbitrated on,
We say he must succeed there or go hang.
Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most
Or needs most, whatsoe'er the love or need—
For he can't wed twice. Then, he must avouch
Or follow, at the least, sufficiently,

The form of faith his conscience holds the best,
Whate'er the process of conviction was.
For nothing can compensate his mistake
On such a point, the man himself being judge—
He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul.

Well now—there's one great form of Christian faith
I happened to be born in—which to teach
Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,
As best and readiest means of living by ;
The same on examination being proved
The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise
And absolute form of faith in the whole world—
Accordingly, most potent of all forms
For working on the world. Observe, my friend,
Such as you know me, I am free to say,
In these hard latter days which hamper one,
Myself, by no immoderate exercise
Of intellect and learning, and the tact
To let external forces work for me,

Bid the street's stones be bread and they are bread,
Bid Peter's creed, or, rather, Hildebrand's,
Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world
And make my life an ease and joy and pride,
It does so,—which for me's a great point gained,
Who have a soul and body that exact
A comfortable care in many ways.
There's power in me and will to dominate
Which I must exercise, they hurt me else :
In many ways I need mankind's respect,
Obedience, and the love that's born of fear :
While at the same time, there's a taste I have,
A toy of soul, a titillating thing,
Refuses to digest these dainties crude.
The naked life is gross till clothed upon :
I must take what men offer, with a grace
As though I would not, could I help it, take !
A uniform to wear though over-rich—
Something imposed on me, no choice of mine ;
No fancy-dress worn for pure fashion's sake

And despicable therefore! now men kneel
And kiss my hand—of course the Church's hand.
Thus I am made, thus life is best for me,
And thus that it should be I have procured;
And thus it could not be another way,
I venture to imagine.

You'll reply—

So far my choice, no doubt, is a success;
But were I made of better elements,
With nobler instincts, purer tastes, like you,
I hardly would account the thing success
Though it do all for me I say.

But, friend,

We speak of what is—not of what might be,
And how 'twere better if 'twere otherwise.
I am the man you see here plain enough—
Grant I'm a beast, why beasts must lead beasts' lives!
Suppose I own at once to tail and claws—

The tailless man exceeds me ; but being tailed
I'll lash out lion-fashion, and leave apes
To dock their stump and dress their haunches up.
My business is not to remake myself,
But make the absolute best of what God made.
Or—our first simile—though you proved me doomed
To a viler berth still, to the steerage-hole,
The sheep-pen or the pig-stye, I should strive
To make what use of each were possible ;
And as this cabin gets upholstery,
That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast
I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes
Enumerated so complacently,
On the mere ground that you forsooth can find
In this particular life I choose to lead
No fit provision for them. Can you not ?
Say you, my fault is I address myself
To grosser estimators than I need,

And that's no way of holding up the soul—
Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows
One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools',—
Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes that ?
I pine among my million imbeciles
(You think) aware some dozen men of sense
Eye me and know me, whether I believe
In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,
And am a fool, or disbelieve in her
And am a knave,—approve in neither case,
Withhold their voices though I look their way :
Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end
(The thing they gave at Florence,—what's its name ?)
While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang
His orchestra of salt-box, tongs and bones,
He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths
Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here—
For even your prime men who appraise their kind

Are men still, catch a thing within a thing,
See more in a truth than the truth's simple self,
Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street
Sixty the minute; what's to note in that?
You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;
Him you must watch—he's sure to fall, yet stands!
Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.
The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist, demireps
That love and save their souls in new French books—
We watch while these in equilibrium keep
The giddy line midway: one step aside,
They're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line
Before your sages,—just the men to shrink
From the gross weights, coarse scales, and labels broad
You offer their refinement. Fool or knave?
Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave
When there's a thousand diamond weights between?
So I enlist them. Your picked Twelve, you'll find,
Profess themselves indignant, scandalised

At thus being held unable to explain
How a superior man who disbelieves
May not believe as well: that's Schelling's way!
It's through my coming in the tail of time,
Nicking the minute with a happy tact.
Had I been born three hundred years ago
They'd say, "What's strange? Blougram of course
believes ;"

And, seventy years since, "disbelieves of course."
But now, "He may believe ; and yet, and yet
How can he ?"—All eyes turn with interest.
Whereas, step off the line on either side—
You, for example, clever to a fault,
The rough and ready man that write apace,
Read somewhat seldomer, think perhaps even less—
You disbelieve ! Who wonders and who cares ?
Lord So-and-So—his coat bedropt with wax,
All Peter's chains about his waist, his back
Brave with the needlework of Noodledom,
Believes ! Again, who wonders and who cares ?

But I, the man of sense and learning too,
The able to think yet act, the this, the that,
I, to believe at this late time of day !
Enough ; you see, I need not fear contempt.

—Except it's yours ! admire me as these may,
You don't. But what at least do you admire ?
Present your own perfections, your ideal,
Your pattern man for a minute—oh, make haste !
Is it Napoleon you would have us grow ?
Concede the means ; allow his head and hand,
(A large concession, clever as you are)
Good !—In our common primal element
Of unbelief (we can't believe, you know—
We're still at that admission, recollect)
Where do you find—apart from, towering-o'er
The secondary temporary aims
Which satisfy the gross tastes you despise—
Where do you find his star ?—his crazy trust
God knows through what or in what ? it's alive

And shines and leads him and that's all we want.
Have we aught in our sober night shall point
Such ends as his were, and direct the means
Of working out our purpose straight as his,
Nor bring a moment's trouble on success
With after-care to justify the same ?
—Be a Napoleon and yet disbelieve !
Why, the man's mad, friend, take his light away.
What's the vague good of the world for which you'd
dare
With comfort to yourself blow millions up ?
We neither of us see it ! we do see
The blown-up millions—spatter of their brains
And writhing of their bowels and so forth,
In that bewildering entanglement
Of horrible eventualities
Past calculation to the end of time !
Can I mistake for some clear word of God
(Which were my ample warrant for it all)
His puff of hazy instincts, idle talk,

“The state, that’s I,” quack-nonsense about kings,
And (when one beats the man to his last hold)
The vague idea of setting things to rights,
Policing people efficaciously,
More to their profit, most of all to his own ;
The whole to end that dismallest of ends
By an Austrian marriage, cant to us the church,
And resurrection of the old *régime*.
Would I, who hope to live a dozen years,
Fight Austerlitz for reasons such and such ?
No : for, concede me but the merest chance
Doubt may be wrong—there’s judgment, life to come !
With just that chance, I dare not. Doubt proves right ?
This present life is all ? you offer me
Its dozen noisy years with not a chance
That wedding an Arch-Duchess, wearing lace,
And getting called by divers new-coined names,
Will drive off ugly thoughts and let me dine,
Sleep, read and chat in quiet as I like !
Therefore, I will not.

Take another case ;
Fit up the cabin yet another way.
What say you to the poet's ? shall we write
Hamlets, Othellos—make the world our own,
Without a risk to run of either sort ?
I can't!—to put the strongest reason first.
“But try,” you urge, “the trying shall suffice :
The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life.
Try to be Shakspeare, leave the rest to fate !”
Spare my self-knowledge—there's no fooling me !
If I prefer remaining my poor self,
I say so not in self-dispraise but praise.
If I'm a Shakspeare, let the well alone—
Why should I try to be what now I am ?
If I'm no Shakspeare, as too probable,—
His power and consciousness and self-delight
And all we want in common, shall I find—
Trying for ever ? while on points of taste
Wherewith, to speak it humbly, he and I
Are dowered alike—I'll ask you, I or he,

Which in our two lives realises most ?

Much, he imagined—somewhat, I possess.

He had the imagination ; stick to that !

Let him say “ In the face of my soul’s works

Your world is worthless and I touch it not

Lest I should wrong them ”—I withdraw my plea.

But does he say so ? look upon his life !

Himself, who only can, gives judgment there.

He leaves his towers and gorgeous palaces

To build the trimmest house in Stratford town ;

Saves money, spends it, owns the worth of things,

Giulio Romano’s pictures, Dowland’s lute ;

Enjoys a show, respects the puppets, too,

And none more, had he seen its entry once,

Than “ Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal.”

Why then should I who play that personage,

The very Pandulph Shakspeare’s fancy made,

Be told that had the poet chanced to start

From where I stand now (some degree like mine

Being just the goal he ran his race to reach)

He would have run the whole race back, forsooth,
And left being Pandulph, to begin write plays ?
Ah, the earth's best can be but the earth's best !
Did Shakspeare live, he could but sit at home
And get himself in dreams the Vatican,
Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls,
And English books, none equal to his own,
Which I read, bound in gold, (he never did).
—Terni and Naples' bay and Gothard's top—
Eh, friend ? I could not fancy one of these—
But, as I pour this claret, there they are—
I've gained them—crossed St. Gothard last July
With ten mules to the carriage and a bed
Slung inside ; is my hap the worse for that ?
We want the same things, Shakspeare and myself,
And what I want, I have : he, gifted more,
Could fancy he too had it when he liked,
But not so thoroughly that if fate allowed
He would not have it also in my sense.
We play one game. I send the ball aloft

No less adroitly that of fifty strokes
Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high
Which sends them back to me : I wish and get.
He struck balls higher and with better skill,
But at a poor fence level with his head,
And hit—his Stratford house, a coat of arms,
Successful dealings in his grain and wool,—
While I receive heaven's incense in my nose
And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.
Ask him, if this life's all, who wins the game ?

Believe—and our whole argument breaks up.
Enthusiasm's the best thing, I repeat ;
Only, we can't command it ; fire and life
Are all, dead matter's nothing, we agree :
And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,
The fact's the same,—belief's fire once in us,
Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself.
We penetrate our life with such a glow
As fire lends wood and iron—this turns steel,

That burns to ash—all's one, fire proves its power
For good or ill, since men call flare success.
But paint a fire, it will not therefore burn.
Light one in me, I'll find it food enough !
Why, to be Luther—that's a life to lead,
Incomparably better than my own.
He comes, reclaims God's earth for God, he says,
Sets up God's rule again by simple means,
Re-opens a shut book, and all is done.
He flared out in the flaring of mankind ;
Such Luther's luck was—how shall such be mine ?
If he succeeded, nothing's left to do :
And if he did not altogether—well,
Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be
I might be also. But to what result ?
He looks upon no future : Luther did.
What can I gain on the denying side ?
Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,
Read the text right, emancipate the world—
The emancipated world enjoys itself

With scarce a thank-you—Blougram told it first
It could not owe a farthing,—not to him
More than St. Paul! 'twould press its pay, you think?
Then add there's still that plaguey hundredth chance
Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run—
For what gain? not for Luther's, who secured
A real heaven in his heart throughout his life,
Supposing death a little altered things!

“Ay, but since really I lack faith,” you cry,
“I run the same risk really on all sides,
In cool indifference as bold unbelief.
As well be Strauss as swing 'twixt Paul and him.
It's not worth having, such imperfect faith,
Nor more available to do faith's work
Than unbelief like yours. Whole faith, or none!”

Softly, my friend! I must dispute that point.
Once own the use of faith, I'll find you faith.
We're back on Christian ground. You call for faith:

I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.
The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,
If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does ?
By life and man's free will, God gave for that !
To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice :
That's our one act, the previous work's His own.
You criticise the soil ? it reared this tree—
This broad life and whatever fruit it bears !
What matter though I doubt at every pore,
Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,
Doubts in the trivial work of every day,
Doubts at the very bases of my soul
In the grand moments when she probes herself—
If finally I have a life to show,
The thing I did, brought out in evidence
Against the thing done to me underground
By Hell and all its brood, for aught I know ?
I say, whence sprang this ? shows it faith or doubt ?
All's doubt in me ; where's break of faith in this ?
It is the idea, the feeling and the love

God means mankind should strive for and show forth,
Whatever be the process to that end,—
And not historic knowledge, logic sound,
And metaphysical acumen, sure !

“ What think ye of Christ,” friend ? when all’s done
and said,

You like this Christianity or not ?

It may be false, but will you wish it true ?

Has it your vote to be so if it can ?

Trust you an instinct silenced long ago

That will break silence and enjoin you love

What mortified philosophy is hoarse,

And all in vain, with bidding you despise ?

If you desire faith—then you’ve faith enough.

What else seeks God—nay, what else seek ourselves ?

You form a notion of me, we’ll suppose,

On hearsay ; it’s a favourable one :

“ But still,” (you add) “ there was no such good man,
Because of contradictions in the facts.

One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome,

This Blougram—yet throughout the tales of him
I see he figures as an Englishman.”

Well, the two things are reconcileable.

But would I rather you discovered that,
Subjoining—“Still, what matter though they be?
Blougram concerns me nought, born here or there.”

Pure faith indeed—you know not what you ask!
Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,
Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much
The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.
It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare.
Some think, Creation's meant to show him forth:
I say, it's meant to hide him all it can,
And that's what all the blessed Evil's for.
Its use in time is to environ us,
Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough
Against that sight till we can bear its stress.
Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain
And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart

Less certainly would wither up at once
Than mind, confronted with the truth of Him.
But time and earth case-harden us to live ;
The feeblest sense is trusted most ; the child
Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,
Plays on and grows to be a man like us.
With me, faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.
Or, if that's too ambitious,—here's my box—
I need the excitation of a pinch
Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose
Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.
“Leave it in peace” advise the simple folk—
Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,
Say I—let doubt occasion still more faith !

You'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,
In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.
How you'd exult if I could put you back

Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,
Geology, ethnology, what not,
(Greek endings with the little passing-bell
That signifies some faith's about to die)
And set you square with Genesis again,—
When such a traveller told you his last news,
He saw the ark a-top of Ararat
But did not climb there since 'twas getting dusk
And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot!
How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,
How act? As other people felt and did;
With soul more blank than this decanter's knob,
Believe—and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate
Full in belief's face, like the beast you'd be!

No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—
He's left, himself, in the middle: the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!

Never leave growing till the life to come !
Here, we've got callous to the Virgin's winks
That used to puzzle people wholesomely—
Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.
What are the laws of Nature, not to bend
If the Church bid them, brother Newman asks.
Up with the Immaculate Conception, then—
On to the rack with faith—is my advice !
Will not that hurry us upon our knees
Knocking our breasts, " It can't be—yet it shall !
Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope ?
Low things confound the high things ! " and so forth.
That's better than acquitting God with grace
As some folks do. He's tried—no case is proved,
Philosophy is lenient—He may go !

You'll say—the old system's not so obsolete
But men believe still: ay, but who and where ?
King Bomba's lazzaroni foster yet
The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes ;

But even of these, what ragamuffin-saint
Believes God watches him continually,
As he believes in fire that it will burn,
Or rain that it will drench him? Break fire's law,
Sin against rain, although the penalty
Be just a singe or soaking? No, he smiles;
Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves.

The sum of all is—yes, my doubt is great,
My faith's the greater—then my faith's enough.
I have read much, thought much, experienced much,
Yet would die rather than avow my fear
The Naples' liquefaction may be false,
When set to happen by the palace-clock
According to the clouds or dinner-time.
I hear you recommend, I might at least
Eliminate, decrassify my faith
Since I adopt it; keeping what I must
And leaving what I can—such points as this!
I won't—that is, I can't throw one away.

Supposing there's no truth in what I said
About the need of trials to man's faith,
Still, when you bid me purify the same,
To such a process I discern no end,
Clearing off one excrescence to see two ;
There's ever a next in size, now grown as big,
That meets the knife—I cut and cut again !
First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last
But Fichte's clever cut at God himself ?
Experimentalize on sacred things ?
I trust nor hand nor eye nor heart nor brain
To stop betimes : they all get drunk alike.
The first step, I am master not to take.

You'd find the cutting-process to your taste
As much as leaving growths of lies unpruned,
Nor see more danger in it, you retort.
Your taste's worth mine ; but my taste proves more
wise

When we consider that the steadfast hold

On the extreme end of the chain of faith
Gives all the advantage, makes the difference,
With the rough purblind mass we seek to rule.
We are their lords, or they are free of us
Just as we tighten or relax that hold.
So, other matters equal, we'll revert
To the first problem—which if solved my way
And thrown into the balance turns the scale—
How we may lead a comfortable life,
How suit our luggage to the cabin's size.

Of course you are remarking all this time
How narrowly and grossly I view life,
Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule
The masses, and regard complacently
“The cabin,” in our old phrase! Well, I do.
I act for, talk for, live for this world now,
As this world calls for action, life and talk—
No prejudice to what next world may prove,
Whose new laws and requirements my best pledge

To observe then, is that I observe these now,
Doing hereafter what I do meanwhile.
Let us concede (gratuitously though)
Next life relieves the soul of body, yields
Pure spiritual enjoyments: well, my friend,
Why lose this life in the meantime, since its use
May be to make the next life more intense?

Do you know, I have often had a dream
(Work it up in your next month's article)
Of man's poor spirit in its progress still
Losing true life for ever and a day
Through ever trying to be and ever being
In the evolution of successive spheres,
Before its actual sphere and place of life,
Half way into the next, which having reached,
It shoots with corresponding foolery
Halfway into the next still, on and off!
As when a traveller, bound from north to south,
Scouts fur in Russia—what's its use in France?

In France spurns flannel—where's its need in Spain ?

In Spain drops cloth—too cumbrous for Algiers !

Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,

A superfluity at Timbuctoo.

When, through his journey, was the fool at ease ?

I'm at ease now, friend—worldly in this world

I take and like its way of life ; I think

My brothers who administer the means

Live better for my comfort—that's good too ;

And God, if he pronounce upon it all,

Approves my service, which is better still.

If He keep silence,—why for you or me

Or that brute-beast pulled-up in to-day's "Times,"

What odds is't, save to ourselves, what life we lead ?

You meet me at this issue—you declare,

All special-pleading done with, truth is truth,

And justifies itself by undreamed ways.

You don't fear but it's better, if we doubt,

To say so, acting up to our truth perceived

However feebly. Do then,—act away !
'Tis there I'm on the watch for you ! How one acts
Is, both of us agree, our chief concern :
And how you'll act is what I fain would see
If, like the candid person you appear,
You dare to make the most of your life's scheme
As I of mine, live up to its full law
Since there's no higher law that counterchecks.
Put natural religion to the test
You've just demolished the revealed with—quick,
Down to the root of all that checks your will,
All prohibition to lie, kill, and thief
Or even to be an atheistic priest !
Suppose a pricking to incontinence—
Philosophers deduce you chastity
Or shame, from just the fact that at the first
Whoso embraced a woman in the plain,
Threw club down, and forewent his brains beside,
So stood a ready victim in the reach
Of any brother-savage club in hand—

Hence saw the use of going out of sight
In wood or cave to prosecute his loves—
I read this in a French book t'other day.
Does law so analyzed coerce you much ?
Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end,
But you who reach where the first thread begins,
You'll soon cut that !—which means you can, but
won't
Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out,
You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,
But there they are, and so you let them rule.
Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,
A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,
Without the good the slave expects to get,
Suppose he has a master after all !
You own your instincts—why what else do I,
Who want, am made for, and must have a God
Ere I can be aught, do aught ?—no mere name
Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,
To wit, a relation from that thing to me,

Touching from head to foot—which touch I feel,
And with it take the rest, this life of ours !
I live my life here ; yours you dare not live.

Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)
Disfigure such a life and call it names,
While, in your mind, remains another way
For simple men : knowledge and power have rights,
But ignorance and weakness have rights too.
There needs no crucial effort to find truth
If here or there or anywhere about—
We ought to turn each side, try hard and see,
And if we can't, be glad we've earned at least
The right, by one laborious proof the more,
To graze in peace earth's pleasant pasturage.
Men are not gods, but, properly, are brutes.
Something we may see, all we cannot see—
What need of lying ? I say, I see all,
And swear to each detail the most minute
In what I think a man's face—you, mere cloud :

I swear I hear him speak and see him wink,
For fear, if once I drop the emphasis,
Mankind may doubt if there's a cloud at all.
You take the simpler life—ready to see,
Willing to see—for no cloud's worth a face—
And leaving quiet what no strength can move,
And which, who bids you move? who has the right?
I bid you; but you are God's sheep, not mine—
“*Pastor est tui Dominus.*” You find
In these the pleasant pastures of this life
Much you may eat without the least offence,
Much you don't eat because your maw objects,
Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock
Open great eyes at you and even butt,
And thereupon you like your friends so much
You cannot please yourself, offending them—
Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep,
You weigh your pleasure with their butts and kicks
And strike the balance. Sometimes certain fears
Restrain you—real checks since you find them so—

Sometimes you please yourself and nothing checks ;
And thus you graze through life with not one lie,
And like it best.

But do you, in truth's name ?
If so, you beat—which means—you are not I—
Who needs must make earth mine and feed my fill
Not simply unbutted at, unbickered with,
But motioned to the velvet of the sward
By those obsequious wethers' very selves.
Look at me, sir ; my age is double yours.
At yours, I knew beforehand, so enjoyed,
What now I should be—as, permit the word,
I pretty well imagine your whole range
And stretch of tether twenty years to come.
We both have minds and bodies much alike.
In truth's name, don't you want my bishopric,
My daily bread, my influence and my state ?
You're young, I'm old, you must be old one day ;
Will you find then, as I do hour by hour,

Women their lovers kneel to, that cut curls
From your fat lap-dog's ears to grace a brooch—
Dukes, that petition just to kiss your ring—
With much beside you know or may conceive ?
Suppose we die to-night : well, here am I,
Such were my gains, life bore this fruit to me,
While writing all the same my articles
On music, poetry, the fictile vase
Found at Albano, or Anacreon's Greek.
But you—the highest honour in your life,
The thing you'll crown yourself with, all your days,
Is—dining here and drinking this last glass
I pour you out in sign of amity
Before we part for ever. Of your power
And social influence, worldly worth in short,
Judge what's my estimation by the fact—
I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,
Hint secresy on one of all these words !
You're shrewd and know that should you publish it
The world would brand the lie—my enemies first,

“ Who'd sneer—the bishop's an arch-hypocrite,
And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool.”

Whereas I should not dare for both my ears
Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile,
Before my chaplain who reflects myself—
My shade's so much more potent than your flesh.
What's your reward, self-abnegating friend?
Stood you confessed of those exceptional
And privileged great natures that dwarf mine—
A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,
A poet just about to print his ode,
A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,
An artist whose religion is his art,
I should have nothing to object! such men
Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,
Their drugget's worth my purple, they beat me.
But you,—you're just as little those as I—
You, Gigadibs, who, thirty years of age,
Write statedly for Blackwood's Magazine,
Believe you see two points in Hamlet's soul

Unseized by the Germans yet—which view you'll
print—

Meantime the best you have to show being still
That lively lightsome article we took
Almost for the true Dickens,—what's the name?
“The Slum and Cellar—or Whitechapel life
Limned after dark!” it made me laugh, I know,
And pleased a month and brought you in ten pounds.
—Success I recognise and compliment,
And therefore give you, if you please, three words
(The card and pencil-scratch is quite enough)
Which whether here, in Dublin, or New York,
Will get you, prompt as at my eyebrow's wink,
Such terms as never you aspired to get
In all our own reviews and some not ours.
Go write your lively sketches—be the first
“Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence”—
Or better simply say, “The Outward-bound.”
Why, men as soon would throw it in my teeth
As copy and quote the infamy chalked broad

About me on the church-door opposite.

You will not wait for that experience though,

I fancy, howsoever you decide,

To discontinue—not detesting, not

Defaming, but at least—despising me !

Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour
Sylvester Blougram, styled *in partibus*
Episcopus, nec non—(the deuce knows what
It's changed to by our novel hierarchy)
With Gigadibs the literary man,
Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,
And ranged the olive stones about its edge,
While the great bishop rolled him out his mind.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.
The other portion, as he shaped it thus
For argumentatory purposes,
He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.

Some arbitrary accidental thoughts
That crossed his mind, amusing because new,
He chose to represent as fixtures there,
Invariable convictions (such they seemed
Beside his interlocutor's loose cards
Flung daily down, and not the same way twice)
While certain hell-deep instincts, man's weak tongue
Is never bold to utter in their truth
Because styled hell-deep ('tis an old mistake
To place hell at the bottom of the earth)
He ignored these,—not having in readiness
Their nomenclature and philosophy :
He said true things, but called them by wrong names.
“On the whole,” he thought, “I justify myself
On every point where cavillers like this
Oppugn my life: he tries one kind of fence—
I close—he's worsted, that's enough for him ;
He's on the ground! if the ground should break away
I take my stand on, there's a firmer yet
Beneath it, both of us may sink and reach.

His ground was over mine and broke the first.
So let him sit with me this many a year!"

He did not sit five minutes. Just a week
Sufficed his sudden healthy vehemence.
(Something had struck him in the "Outward-bound"
Another way than Blougram's purpose was)
And having bought, not cabin-furniture
But settler's-implements (enough for three)
And started for Australia—there, I hope,
By this time he has tested his first plough,
And studied his last chapter of St. John.

MEMORABILIA.

1.

Ан, did you once see Shelley plain,
And did he stop and speak to you ?
And did you speak to him again ?
How strange it seems, and new !

2.

But you were living before that,
And you are living after,
And the memory I started at—
My starting moves your laughter !

3.

I crossed a moor with a name of its own
And a use in the world no doubt,
Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone
'Mid the blank miles round about—

4.

For there I picked up on the heather
And there I put inside my breast
A moulted feather, an eagle-feather—
Well, I forget the rest.

END OF VOL. I.

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